

The faith of the Christian who has the faith of Jesus always pleads: "Look not upon me, a sinner, but look upon my Advocate. There is nothing in me worthy of the love He manifested for me, but He gave His life for me. Behold me in Jesus. He became sin for me that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

This is the heart of the teaching of Jesus Christ. It is the true, common faith of all God's children. And

"He who through faith is righteous shall live"—Rom. 1:17

In the invitation of the gospel of Christ, all are being called to trust in God's unmerited grace through faith in the blood of Jesus to wash away all their sin and guilt. The free gift of forgiveness and eternal life is promised to all who accept the invitation to come to Christ to partake of the cleansing water of life. Let "whosoever will" call upon His name and He will not only freely forgive, but He will give the gift of the Holy Spirit to begin to write God's law upon the heart of the forgiven believer. Will you cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ? Pray this simple prayer to Jesus now and He will in no way cast you away.

Lord, I know that my life is full of sin and selfishness.

Please forgive me of my sins and reckon me as being righteous through faith in your sinless life and atoning death on Calvary. Please write your commandments upon my heart and daily teach me to call upon You for your forgiveness and unmerited grace.

Be the Lord and Shepherd of my life and let me learn to love and forgive and serve others as you have loved and forgiven me and given Yourself for me on the cross.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

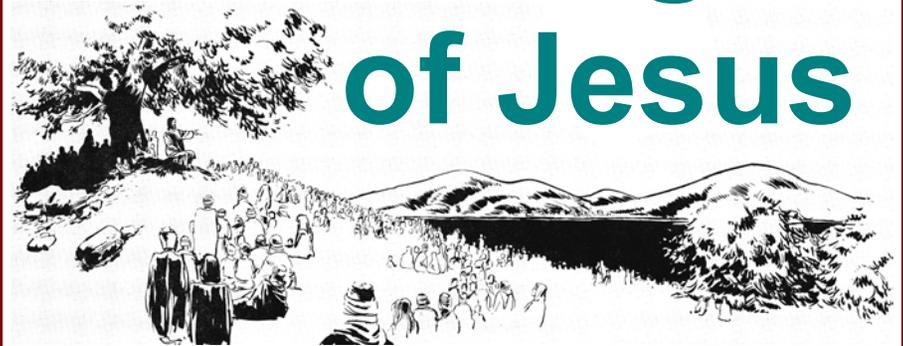
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The Simple Teachings of Jesus



The Two Great Commandments

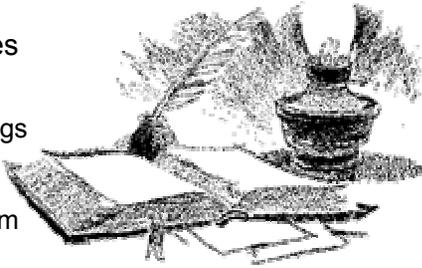
- I. Love the Lord
- II. Love Your Neighbor

The Gospel of Jesus

The Simple Teaching of Jesus

A common view of Christianity goes something like this:

I believe in the simple teachings of Jesus. My religion is to live by the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.



During the visit of a world-renowned evangelist to Australia, the following letter appeared in a leading Melbourne newspaper:

I am tired of being told I'm an evil sinner who needs to repent and be saved by some sort of blood atonement. It's an insult in this civilized age. Why don't you tell us about the goodness and dignity of man?

Jesus taught tolerance and love for one another and respect for human goodness. Let us have the simple teachings of Jesus instead of all this "high-falutin" theology.

When George Whitefield was stirring eighteenth-century England with his mighty revivals, he was patronized by people of high repute in the English court. The Duchess of Buckingham was among those invited to his meetings. She sat through Whitefield's evangelistic address with her nose high in the air and then wrote a lady friend these words:

Their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect toward their superiors in perpetually endeavoring to level all ranks and do away with all distinction. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting, and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high ranking and good breeding.

A few years ago liberal scholars of the Christian movement espoused what they called the simple teachings of Jesus—the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. They claimed that Paul, as a learned lawyer and theologian, had made the teachings of Jesus too complicated and had provoked the church

We could lay aside all the writings of Paul and still have his theology in these simple but far-reaching words of Christ. Here is the principle of substitution. He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man receives a righteous man's reward.

To all of us Scripture says,

None is righteous, no, not one.—Rom. 3:10

There is no one . . . good but God alone.—Luke 18:19

He is "Jesus Christ the Righteous" (1 John 2:1). He is "the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 41:14; 43:14; 49:7). He is the only righteous One. And he who receives this one righteous Man in the name of the righteous Man shall receive the righteous Man's reward.

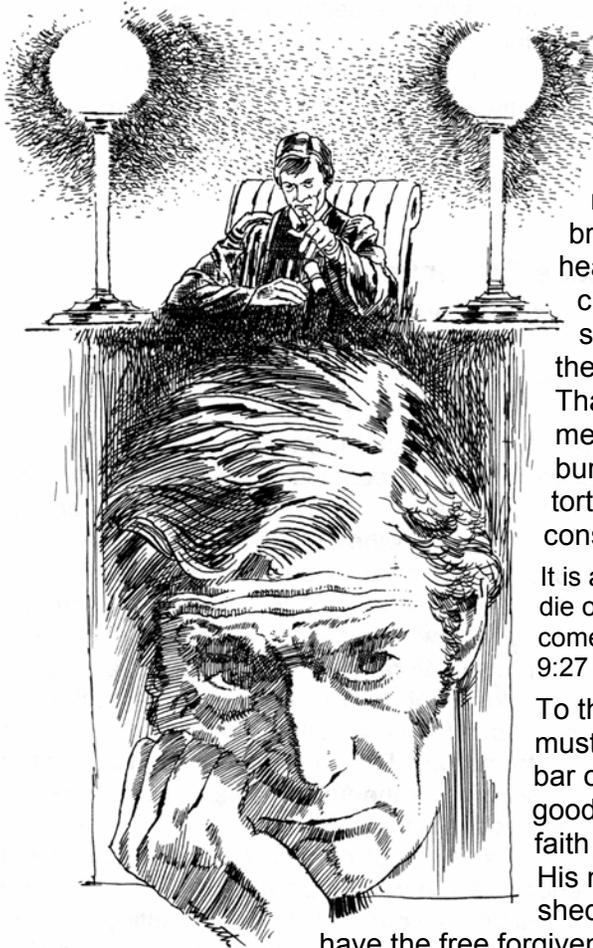
We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.—2 Cor. 5:10

We can come to the judgment in our own name and on our own performance. We can come with all our good deeds. We can throw them down in front of the judgment seat, saying, "Here I am, Lord!" If we have a righteousness that fully measures with the righteousness set forth in the simple teachings of Jesus, we will stand. But if our righteousness falls one iota short, we will be condemned and cast out. To such, Scripture says,

Cast the worthless servant into outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.—Matt. 25:30

But we may come to the judgment in the name of a righteous Man. Rather than coming there in our own name and in the strength of our own performance, we should rather come in the name of that righteous Man. For He is the only Man who has a righteousness that the judgment bar of God will acknowledge.

The great scholar, Hans Kung, gave the funeral address at the death of the renowned theologian, Karl Barth. He told of a conversation he once had with Barth. While discussing the Scriptures, they had some disagreement, and Kung said to Barth, "I grant to you good faith." Barth replied, "I don't even grant to myself good faith. On that last great day when I appear in judgment, I'm not going to come there with... my great bag of theology [for he wrote more than most of us would read in a lifetime]. I'm not going to come staggering into the judgment and put that down, for that would make all the angels laugh. Neither will I come and plead my good intentions. But my plea will be, God be merciful to me a sinner.



The Apostles' Creed is accepted alike by all branches of the Christian church. It is remarkable for its brief simplicity. In the heart of that familiar creed is this short statement: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." That is the joyful message to souls burdened with guilt and tortured by their own consciences.

It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.—Heb. 9:27

To those who realize they must face the judgment bar of God, it is indeed good news that through faith in Jesus Christ, in His name, through the shedding of His blood, we

have the free forgiveness of all sins. Jesus was counted a sinner for our sakes. So through faith we are counted righteous for His sake. We stand before His judgment seat fully acceptable to God. Our consciences will never have rest, will never stop accusing us, until by faith we grasp that God acquits us for the sake of Jesus Christ.

In the Name of a Righteous Man

In a very precious statement our Lord said,

He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.—Matt. 10:41

to argument for nearly 2,000 years. Although such reasoning has been disproved among theologians, it is still common among men on the street.

There seems to be a certain appeal to "the simple teachings of Jesus"—the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and living by the golden rule. So, laying aside the theology of Paul and other New Testament theologians, let us consider only the simple teachings of Jesus.

The Two Great Commandments

A learned Pharisee once asked our Lord the question,

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?

In other words, what is most important in all the books of Moses? Christ replied simply,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.—Matt. 22:36-39

Again,

A lawyer stood up to put Him [Christ] to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'—Luke 10:25

No one should have trouble understanding a question like that. But Christ knew that the lawyer was trying to trap Him, so He turned the question right back on the lawyer:

He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read?' The lawyer answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' Then Jesus told him, 'You have answered right; do this, and you will live.' —Luke 10:26-28

We should first notice that Jesus was not teaching a new ethic—a new standard of conduct, a new rule of living. He was illuminating an old ethic. His statements were taken directly from the writings of Moses. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ was the God of Old Testament revelation, the God of the Hebrews.

In a prophecy about Christ in the book of Isaiah, it is written that He would magnify the law and make it honorable (Isa. 42:21). Magnifying an object does not change it but only makes it more distinct. All the lines, contours and details stand out with startling clarity. So the Messiah would not do away with the old ethic. He would magnify it. He would make its meaning clearer and its demands more radical.

Love the Lord

The first great commandment is,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

Jesus magnified this commandment when He said:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.—Matt. 10:37.

You cannot serve God and mammon.—Matt. 6:24

The heart cannot be divided between God and things. He will accept no halfhearted service.

Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.—Luke 14:33

Jesus not only taught this commandment. He lived it.

I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.
—John 5:30

My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.—John 4:34

I do not seek My own glory.—John 8:50

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.—John 3:14-15

Jesus died the death of every sinner. But because of His divine sinlessness, it was not possible for the grave to hold Him. And when He arose from the dead and gave the disciples His parting instructions, this was His commission:

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'—Luke 24:45-47

Go into all the world and preach the gospel [the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ; see 1 Cor. 15:1-4] to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.—Mark 16:15-16

The essential ingredient of the Christian religion then, is not only the ethic of Christ, the rule of love He prescribed. If we have any sense of our own unworthiness, we must surely realize that these "simple teachings of Jesus" condemn us all.

Jesus went beyond this teaching. He Himself, the only sinless specimen of humanity from the beginning to the end of time, laid down that perfect life as a spotless offering to God. He was

the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.—John 1:29

He gave His life a ransom for many—in our place, in our stead. By His death the justice of God was satisfied with respect to us. Thus, the mercy of God could be extended in the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ.

On his travels in Asia Minor, Paul preached,

Through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses—Acts 13:38-39

The teaching of Jesus is not His ethic alone. Beyond His ethic is the message of His divine sacrifice for the sins of the world and the setting forth of His offering for the forgiveness of sins to all who believe.



The prophecy of "intercession for the transgressors" was fulfilled on Golgotha when our great High Priest prayed,

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.—Luke 23:34

The Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.—Mark 10:45

The word *for* in this text means *in the stead of*. Christ came to give His life *in the stead of*, in the place of, others. He Himself bore our transgressions.

Christ also died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.—1 Peter 3:18

Because the price of transgression has been fully paid, we may have forgiveness of sins through faith in His blood. When He took the wine, a sacrament of His death, Jesus said,

This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.—Matt. 26:28

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree'.—Gal. 3:13

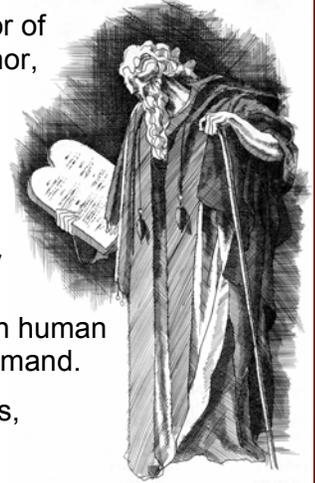
Christ bore our sins. He took the curse the law pronounces on sinners. He did it that we, through believing in what He has done, might be forgiven our sins and might inherit the blessings promised those who keep the law.

Jesus loved God with all the ardor and fervor of His being. Doing God's will, seeking His honor, meant more to Christ than daily food.

The most certain proof of love is in filial obedience. Of Christ it is written that He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). Jesus not only taught what it meant to love God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength. He Himself in human flesh was the living embodiment of that command.

And if we may again take the words of Jesus,

Do this, and you will live.



Love Your Neighbor

The last six of the Ten Commandments are summarized in the words, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus did not come to do away with the Old Testament ethic. In fact, He was here quoting from the book of Leviticus (Lev. 19:18). Jesus came to magnify the law, to show what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. Said the Master:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven [which means he will not even be considered] but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. —Matt. 5:17-19

Then the Lord became specific. He began to take particular commandments from the Old Testament to illustrate that He had not come to destroy but to magnify its ethic.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire.—Matt. 5:21-22

The Lord taught that to be sinfully angry, to use abusive language or even to be judgmental toward our neighbor (Matt. 7:1) is not fulfilling the commandment. Rather, it will incur the judgment of God. If we have offended our neighbor, Christ showed that our worship is not acceptable to God unless we first go and make right our difference. God does not want worship tainted with hypocrisy.

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.—Matt. 5:23-24

Jesus also elaborated the seventh commandment.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.—Matt. 5:27-28

Christ went on to speak of truthfulness. He said that no oath of confirmation is necessary for the truthful heart (Matt. 5:33-37). In fact, He declared:

I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.—Matt. 12:36-37

Jesus also taught that fulfilling the commandment of love to our neighbor means carrying no spirit of retaliation, bearing no grudges (Matt. 5:38-41). As for our enemies, He said:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.—Matt. 5:43-45

Jesus not only taught this. His word was with authority because He was what He taught. He was the perfect demonstration of One who loved His enemies and prayed for those who despitefully used Him. Jesus was the fulfillment of this commandment—the living expression of it. While His enemies were crucifying Him and treating Him with the utmost indignity, He prayed,

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."—Luke 23:34

He was despised and rejected by men
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as One from whom men hide their faces
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,
yet He opened not His mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so He opened not His mouth.
By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
and as for His generation, who considered
that He was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of My people?
And they made His grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in His death,
although He had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in His mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief;
when He makes Himself an offering for sin,
He shall see His offspring, He shall prolong His days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand;
He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied;
by His knowledge [that is, by His bitter suffering and death]
shall the Righteous One, My Servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and He shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
and He shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because He poured out His soul to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors [the very words Christ quoted];
yet He bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

—Isa. 53:3-12.



After that,

Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.—Matt. 16:21

Christ at last began unveiling the mystery of His mission. His mission was more than being a great Teacher. He was a Saviour. He

began to show His disciples that He must...be killed, and on the third day be raised.

The word "must" signifies a divine necessity. The Son of Man must be put to death. The law must be fulfilled—every dot and iota of it. And the law not only commands righteousness; it curses everyone who fails to perform all its commands.

For it is written, 'Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.'—Gal. 3:10

The psalmist says,

Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!—Ps. 106:3

Though one keeps the whole law "but fails in one point," he is "guilty of all of it" and is still cursed (James 2:10). That is the law—the justice of God.

Because the law must be fulfilled, because the sentence against sin must be executed, because the curse must fall on the imperfect and the disobedient—as all of us are—Christ declared that the Son of Man must go up to Jerusalem.

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.—John 10:11

I lay down My life, that I may take it again.—John 10:17

Jesus referred to a prophecy of Isaiah when He said,

For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in Me, 'And He was reckoned with transgressors.'—Luke 22:37

Christ insisted that this had to happen. He had to be counted a sinner for our sakes. In this passage Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 53, a scripture which has powerfully touched the hearts of men and women down through the ages.

As Paul said:

Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.... While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.—Rom. 5:6-8

Be Perfect

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus unfolded the kind of righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom of God:

I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."—Matt. 5:20

Some people must have felt their last hope dashed to pieces when they heard that. After all, the scribes and Pharisees were religious professionals. They were not amateurs at being righteous. It was their specialty. They worked at it full time. They apparently left no stone unturned in keeping the law in order to be righteous. Ordinary people were hushed with awe before the scribes and Pharisees, who even fasted three times a week. Yet Jesus said,

Unless you have a righteousness that is better than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

We are reminded of the disciples who on another occasion exclaimed in astonishment,

Who then can be saved?—Matt. 19:25

At the peak of his discourse, Christ laid down this astounding requirement,

You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.—Matt. 5:48

And once again we echo Christ's command,

Do this, and you will live.

Do you say you are going to live by the teachings of Jesus? Then "Do this, and you will live." And if you do not do it, you will die.

In fact, you will be condemned if you are found with one idle word. Have you ever been angry with your brother, guilty of the spirit of revenge? Have you ever held any grudge? Have you loved and prayed for your enemies as Jesus did? And do you imagine that the high and holy God will accept anything less than perfection? To do so would be contrary to the teaching of His own Son that you must be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

What hope would you have in the judgment if you should die tonight and your life were judged (as it surely will be) by the standard of that holy law seen in the human example of Jesus Christ? If you were judged alone on how well you measured up to the teachings of Jesus, what chance would you have of being acquitted? The simple teachings of Jesus would be simply terrifying—worse than the thunders of Sinai!

When God called the children of Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai to give them the Ten Commandments. He told them to prepare for the occasion by washing their clothes and sanctifying themselves. So the people cleaned and sanctified themselves (Ex. 19:10, 14). With Moses they stood around the mountain. Here, surely, was an exemplary, holy people.

Then, with peals of thunder, the Lord began to speak from Mount Sinai:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.—Ex. 20:2-3

The mount was on fire, and the earth shook. The voice of God—the Word of God, which is quick and powerful and

sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit.—Heb. 4:12

entered into the hearts of that people. Great terror fell upon them. Even Moses said,

I tremble with fear.—Heb. 12:21

And the people cried out,

Let not God speak to us, lest we die.—Ex. 20:19

This is what happens to poor, feeble, mortal man born in sin, who drinks iniquity like water.—Job 15:16

whose heart

is evil from his youth.—Gen. 8:21

deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt.—Jer. 17:9

He thinks he is righteous until confronted with the purity of the Almighty. As Calvin said, "For if the stars, which seem so very bright at night, lose their brilliance in the light of the sun, what do we think will happen even to the rarest innocence of man when it is compared with God's purity?"

But if the thunders of Sinai are terrifying, what about the teachings of Jesus? If we are to be judged by such a standard—for God will judge "the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16)—well might we cry out, "Who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17). These "simple teachings" of Jesus are simply terrifying!

The Gospel of Jesus

There is an interesting progression in the teachings of Jesus. When the Lord unfolded His teachings, He first showed the perfection that God demands of man. He declared that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was not good enough. God requires a righteousness like the righteousness of God Himself. The disciples were so amazed by this high standard that they asked, "Who then can be saved?" Then Christ gave convincing evidence by His works that He was the true Messiah, the Son of God.

He asked His disciples,

'Who do men say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'—Matt. 16:13-16

Jesus first taught His disciples that the only kind of righteousness acceptable to God is a perfect life. In the face of this requirement, the disciples realized their sinful condition and wondered how they could be saved. Then Jesus brought them to the confession that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God.