

## READING

*Jesus loved Mary more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples ... said to him 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness'.  
- **The Gospel according to Philip***

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

That reading from the Gospel of Phillip - one of the famed gnostic Gospels - lifts the lid on an explosive conspiracy: Mary Magdalene was JESUS' GIRLFRIEND ... maybe even wife!!

Phillip's Gospel wasn't written until 150 (maybe 200) years *after* Jesus, but that hasn't stopped the popularity of these ideas.

At the front of the New Testament, there are four so-called Gospels with names attached, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

There's no "Gospel of Philip" there.

The document in his name is one of over 50 *other* accounts about Jesus that popped up between the second and 4th centuries.

None of these extras got into the Biblical collection or what we call the 'canon' – on that whole process, go check out the very fun episode 30, 'Canon fodder'.

Anyway, these extra-Biblical accounts say some pretty weird stuff too:

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

According to the Gospel of James, Jesus worshipped the Goddess "Sophia", the embodiment of Wisdom.

Jesus plots his own death *in collaboration* with Judas in the Gospel of Judas. And in the Infancy Story of Thomas, the teenager Jesus uses his magical powers to kill kids and blind the parents when they complain ... True story! ... I mean, it's a completely made-up story. But it's there in that bizarre second-century text.

Christianity caused a massive stir in the Ancient World - as the first Gospels came to be popular, loads of people wanted more Gospels, for different contexts and different tastes.

And, yet, when the Bible was finalised, only four of these accounts made the cut.

What was it about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that set them apart from the rest?

What do we know about these four authors - were they even the authors – and why would anyone rely on *their* accounts of Jesus, rather than the Gospels of Philip, Mary, Judas and the rest of the gang???

I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

---

## INTRODUCTION

---

**JD:** So Simon, you know, here's, here's an easy one. Ready? What are the Gospels?

**Simon Gathercole:** What are the Gospels? Well, the Gospels, if you're limiting it to the four canonical Gospels in the New Testament, the four New Testament Gospels are basically lives of Jesus.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

That would be how the earliest readers would have perceived them.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

That's my guest Professor Simon Gathercole.

Simon is a New Testament Scholar – a true scholar's scholar – at Fitzwilliam College at the University of Cambridge which is where I visited him for this episode.

Simon has written dozens of books and articles on today's subject, including the recently published *The Gospel and the Gospels*, which I have close at hand on my desk because it's a treasure-trove of information about early Christianity and its founding texts. This book strips back the myths and dogma and answers the question: What can we know with high confidence about the earliest –the very earliest–core of Christian belief and proclamation?

I've been trying to get him on the show for years. I finally pulled it off.

---

**JD:** For my sceptical listeners, of which we have quite a few in Underceptions, what do you think is the value of picking up one of these four Gospels? The value intellectually, existentially, or whatever?

**Simon Gathercole:** Well, I think, I think intellectually that they are what give us, um, the closest insight that we have in, uh, about Jesus, you know, they're, they're, they're all designed to give a fairly, you know, not complete, but a sufficient account of who Jesus was, uh, um, as a figure in, in ancient history.

But I think obviously the more significant thing about, about them is that Jesus is not just a figure of antiquarian interest, but as, as, uh, one of his disciples puts it in one of the gospels, you have the words of eternal life.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

So, uh, the value of, of, um, of picking up one of these gospels and reading it and inwardly digesting it is not just, uh, to get insight into ancient history, but to, uh, to understand who God is.

---

### READING

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.*

*Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Those are the opening four verses of the book of Luke Gospel - the longest of the four Gospels.

We don't know who Theophilus was—the one Luke dedicates the volume to—but the best guess is that it is some local official who is interested in Christianity, has learned a bit about it already, and is looking for an orderly account of the facts.

Luke's intro takes the classic form of ancient historical writing: others have had a go at this; now I want to give you my best attempt at the facts.

Written a couple of decades later, here's the opening of one of the historical works of Flavius Josephus:

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

*Those who undertake to write histories, do not, I perceive, take that trouble on one and the same account, but for many reasons, and those such as are very different one from another ... for since I was myself interested in that war which we Jews had with the Romans, and knew myself its particular actions, and what conclusion it had, I was forced to give the history of it, because I saw that others perverted the truth of those actions in their writings.*

The similarities are fairly obvious.

Luke might have made some claims about Jesus that raised eyebrows - but he did so following all the literary conventions of the day. It reads like a fairly standard ancient historical biography.

---

**Simon Gathercole:** There was already an established tradition of biography, biographies of emperors, biographies of great figures from the Roman world, uh, biographies of lesser-known people but who were important to the author. Uh, so the first readers would have come across these books and seen them as biographies, and that's pretty similar to how they were intended to be

So, uh, Luke at the beginning of the Act of the Apostles talks about, you know, his first book, the Gospel of Luke, as What Jesus began to do and to teach so, uh, really encapsulating Jesus, uh, actions and his, and his teachings with a special focus on the crucifixion and resurrection in each case. So they're biographies, but they're biographies with a, with a particular message to them, uh, especially, uh, in, in terms of what

**JD:** Which was pretty normal for biographies

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. Yeah. So, so they were often written as As exemplary books, you know, either, uh, things to imitate in a great figure or things not to imitate in a less great figure.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**JD:** Yeah. Um, but interestingly the, the, the gospels as biographies, um, it's, they don't really end up saying live like Jesus. Do they? I mean, he's not an exemplary figure in that sense.

**Simon Gathercole:** No, that's right. So, so the, the focus in the gospel biographies, if, if to call, to call 'em that is on this term [00:02:00] is, is on the good news. So, so it's really about what Jesus has uniquely done, uh, in an inimitable way. Uh, so the, the word, the word gospel in English means good news. And, and the term that was used in the, uh, original Greek was you, angelion, which basically means the same thing. You means good, something done well, and angelion means a message. So it's a message about what what God has done, which is good news for humanity. So, so, yeah, there's less of an emphasis, although there's a bit of an emphasis on, on, on how we should live like Jesus. The focus is on what Jesus has uniquely and uniquely done and which is not something we can replicate.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Mark is likely the first of the Gospels written—scholars usually date it to the mid-to-late 60s AD.

Matthew and Luke come in the decades immediately after that. And there's a pretty strong consensus (with some worthy exceptions) that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source. Matthew seems clearly written to a mainly Jewish audience, Luke to a mainly non-Jewish or Gentile audience – probably around AD 80.

Together Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels. That word “view together” basically refers to the way they all three cover similar material in a similar order—very probably because Luke and Matthew used Mark as the principal source, along with a couple of other minor sources they each had.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

John's Gospel is pretty different. It's the same basic plot - Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, emerged out of the circle of John the Baptist, and then with his disciples travelled to Jerusalem where Jesus was executed and raised to life. But it's the long speeches of Jesus that set this Gospel apart. And there's much more focus on Jesus' identity.

Most scholars date John to the 90s AD. That's what I taught for years at Sydney University and elsewhere. But the work of a few outlier scholars leaves me nowadays thinking it could well be as early as Mark, 60s AD. But that's another conversation.

Either way, all of these Gospels – unlike the Gnostic Gospels – are written within about 60 years of Jesus. For ancient history, that's pretty good. The best account of the emperor of the same time (Tiberius) was written 80 years later - by the great chronicler Cornelius Tacitus.

---

**JD:** And so what are our earliest manuscripts of these books we call Gospels, these New Testament Gospels?

**Simon Gathercole:** So the earliest manuscripts are, come from around, uh AD 200 early 3rd century, um, so P45, um, in, in Dublin, which is a manuscript of the four gospels, uh, and, uh, other, other manuscripts like P75, which is a manuscript of Luke and John.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Sorry to interrupt—I promise to get out of Simon's way soon.

P just stands for "papyrus" and the number is just how these manuscripts are catalogued.

P45 was discovered in Egypt in the 1930s and dates to around 250 AD.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

The significance of that is that it's a copy of the Gospels before the great Roman persecution of 303-312, where the Romans did their best to burn all Christian documents.

The late great New Testament scholar Larry Hurtado said of the find:

“Like a flare bursting over a night-time battlefield, it cast light upon the previously darkened pre-Constantinian centuries of the textual history of the New Testament, forcing revisions of scholarly views on several major matters. In one giant step, P45 brought scholarship on the text of the Gospels from the mid-fourth century practically to the doorstep of the second century.

P75—the other one Simon mentioned—is also really cool.

It's just Luke and John but it's even older than P45—perhaps around the year 200.

Then there are lots of little scraps of pages of the Gospels. I got to play with P.Oxy 5345 in Oxford a few years ago. It's a bit of the first two pages of Mark's Gospel. It, too, is from around the year 200.

There's a photo in the show notes to prove it.

---

**Simon Gathercole:** So there are several, uh, and as you get later on. There are more and more manuscripts, and more, more complete ones. Uh, there's a very early, there's an early fragment of John's Gospel as well, P52, which is just a tiny little, uh, well, credit card sized fragment of John's Gospel, and that's usually thought to come from the second century as well.



## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**JD:** Um, and am I right that there's a, there's a little, um, Scrap of Mark the, the front, yes. Front and back page of Mark. That's probably second

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah, that's right, yeah, that's been very recently published, uh, yeah, yeah.

**JD:** Um, and is the reason we don't have more just that papyri, you know, they, they wear out or, um, I, I've often thought, and this is just a question off the cuff really, that the, the great persecution. of 303 to 312 the first edict was burn all their scriptures. Um, so do you think this is why we don't have so many or, or is the other explanation the right one?

**Simon Gathercole:** I think probably a bit of both. I mean, there was also a great persecution in the sort of around 250 as well, when a lot of manuscripts would have been destroyed. Um, almost all, well, all the manuscripts that we have of the Gospels, they're early.

Come from Egypt as well. So, so, so it's only because of the particular climate of Egypt that most manuscripts have survived from there. There were no doubt stacks of gospel manuscripts in, in, in Syria, in, uh, Asia Minor or Turkey. Italy, Rome, you know, in particular, especially in Rome, Greece, but because of the particular climate of, of Europe, we don't have many of them. So yeah, obviously no, no manuscripts have survived from that period from, uh, from

**JD:** Indeed. So, um, okay, so, uh, You're saying roughly 200 may, maybe some scraps from a little bit earlier, Uhhuh Um, some might say, ah, well the gospels, there's no evidence. The gospels were written before that. Mm-Hmm. before say 150, 160 mm-Hmm. , uh, because are only physical evidence of the gospels.

**Simon Gathercole:** From that period. Sure. I mean, I, I think if you applied that argument consistently, you'd end up basically with hardly any literature from the ancient world. So a ta, a historian

**JD:** that. Tacitus wrote in the 10th

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah, exactly. . Yeah. So, so, so, uh, uh, most of our manuscript evidence is, uh, is. You know, at least a century later than the original composition, often a millennium later and like in the case of Tacitus Yeah, I thought of him because he's my favorite Roman historian

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Publius Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman politician and historian.

He's best known for his two major works *Annals* and *Histories*.

The *Annals* is where we learn that Emperor Nero held Christians responsible for the Great Fire of Rome, resulting in the first Christian persecution.

That same passage confirms the existence of Pontius Pilate and his role in handing over Jesus to be executed.

Additionally, the book covers the reign of Emperor Tiberius, who ruled during Jesus' lifetime.

*The Annals* is widely considered the best account of Tiberius' life and is thought to have been composed around 115 AD - approximately 80 years after Tiberius' reign. That's a hair's breadth by historical standards.

The Gospels go one better though; conservative estimates place the composition of the LATEST Gospel - John - about 70 years after the life of Jesus.

Put simply, the Gospels are closer in time to their main subject than the authoritative *Annals* are to Tiberius.

---

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**Simon Gathercole:** But yeah, the same applies. So with with Plato, we've we've we've got a few fragments of you know, 300 years later But again, only sort of small fragments often with often with compositions from the ancient world, you have to find other, you have to look for other sorts of evidence for when they're actually originally composed, and we do have references to the Gospels, uh, in other literature that's much earlier than the manuscript.

So, so, uh, Ignatius, um, Ignatius of Antioch, writing probably in the sort of 110s. Um, ad he, he, he alludes to a lot of the content of the gospels. Um, some peculiar phrases that only come up, come up in the gospels, like Jesus fulfilling all righteousness. Uh, a quotation from the gospel of [00:07:00] Matthew. Matthew referenced the gospel of Matthew, uh, and, and, and other authors like Justin Martyr writing in the mid, mid second century talks about the Forgo Well talks about.

Plural Gospels written either by disciples or by the friends of the disciples. So there are, there are, there is a, did a key, another example from the early second century where we do have references to the Gospels. Um, even if not sort of physical manuscripts of them.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Ignatius of Antioch was a Syrian bishop. He was a legend. I don't mean myth—he was very much a real person—I mean, he was amazing. He was arrested by Roman soldiers, dragged across Turkey and Greece and then executed in Rome when Trajan was emperor (so around 115). Along the way, he snuck off letters to various churches. And we have 7 of them. They sit on my desk every day!

The cool thing is, in those letters, he quotes themes and sayings that are also in the Gospels. Like in his letter to the Ephesian church, he speaks about love being the principal sign of the Christian (that's from Jesus),

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

but then he says "A tree is known by its fruit", which is straight from Jesus. We have Jesus saying that in Matthew chapter 7.

Then there's Justin Martyr, whom Simon also just mentioned. He comes about 30 years after Ignatius, and he refers to the Gospels as the "memoirs of the apostles, which are called Gospels". He says they were already being read out as Scripture in church meetings already by 140-150.

---

**JD:** So thinking of those Ignatian references, would you lean toward thinking when Ignatius says something that sounds verbally very much like what we have in the Gospel and he says, as you have it in the Gospel, do you think he means the book yet? Or, or as some say, oh no, no, no, no, he's not referring to the book, it's the oral tradition of the gospel, what, what would be your hunch?

**Simon Gathercole:** I think sometimes in those, in those second century manuscripts, uh, so in those second century compositions, those documents, sometimes it's probably referring to a, a sort of broad body of tradition. Some, some of them may only have had one gospel. Uh, and so when they refer to the gospel, that's the gospel that they're most, most familiar with. Probably Matthew's Gospel or John's Gospel, which are the two most popular gospels in the second century in terms of kind of references to them. Um, but, uh, Justin as an example of someone who, who probably knows all four gospels, um, Ignatius, I think certainly knows more than one, probably John and, and Matthew - they were certainly aware of these gospel texts pretty early on.

---

## John Dickson (Studio)

Once Constantine became a Christian in 312 and the persecution of Christians ended, the Bible was copied freely – and so we get an explosion of texts from that time on. Constantine actually helped. He

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

commissioned 50 complete copies of the Bible to be produced by the best scribes using the best materials. It cost the equivalent of millions of dollars to produce—and about 5000 cow skins for the pages. He must have seen it as some kind of compensation, since the emperors just before him had destroyed hundreds, maybe thousands, of copies of Christian Scripture.

---

**JD:** Before Constantine, who copied these texts?

**Simon Gathercole:** That's a good question. I mean, I can imagine that some of them may have been copied by professional scribes who weren't Christians. We just don't, we just don't know. Uh, but uh, I, I suspect most of the copying was done by, by Christians, in, you know, entrusted with this

**JD:** The handwriting gets better though in the 5th and 6th centuries, no?

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah, some of, some of, some of them, yeah, some, some of them are written in, are copied in pretty similar styles to most, most other documents from the time. Um, they're often much, much more legible than kind of administrative texts, which, are often really incomprehensible even to someone who knows Greek pretty well unless you know the Particular system of abbreviations and, um, so the, the, the gospel manuscripts, even the pretty early ones are very legible, um, you know, written in nice capital letters. The thing that makes it difficult for people coming across them for the first time is that there are no gaps between the words.

**JD:** I thought I knew Greek when I, when I graduated and, and, and then they showed me what the manuscripts actually look like.

**Simon Gathercole:** yeah, yeah, yeah. So just a series of capital letters, um, with usually no kind of Word divisions or, or, or even sentence divisions. Um, yeah.

**John Dickson (Studio)**

The Gospels are historical biographies.

They were in circulation within the first century, and read as Scripture in the church in the early-100s AD.

But what about the authors themselves—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

Are these invented names, attached to the manuscripts in the decades and centuries after they were written?

Some think so.

It's one of Simon Gathercole's specialties, so I asked him about it.

- after the break.

---

**BREAK 1**

---

**MEDIA:** [Who were the Gospel authors](#)

---

**John Dickson (Studio)**

That's New Testament scholar and self-described "agnostic atheist" Bart Ehrman, making the case that the four Gospels in the Bible were originally *anonymous* documents.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

Ehrman reckons Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were names added to these documents at a later time—to bolster the credibility of otherwise anonymous texts.

Someone in the second century added the name 'Matthew' to the Gospel we now call Matthew. That's because this was a big name, the apostle Matthew, tax collector and follower of Jesus. (you can read about him in Matthew 9 and 10).

Mark was added because he gets a mention in Acts 12, where his full name is John Mark. He's also mentioned in one of Paul's letters. He was likely a companion of Peter and composed his Gospel based on what he heard Peter say over the years. Well, someone like Ehrman thinks that's rubbish. The name 'Mark' was just added to that Gospel for effect.

Then there's Luke. He gets a passing mention in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he's called the 'physician'. So, someone plucked that name out and added it to the anonymous text we know called Luke's Gospel (that's the view of Ehrman, anyhow).

Same with John. His work was anonymous, so the story goes, and then in the second century someone added the title 'Gospel according to John' to give the impression it was produced by one of the actual disciples of Jesus.

That's the view.

What does Simon reckon?

---

**TAPE**

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**JD:** Can we talk about the, um, the authors of the Gospels or the titles, uh, of the Gospels? How early do we find these author mentions, Gospel according to Matthew, Gospel according to Luke, et cetera?

**Simon Gathercole:** Uhhuh . Well, the, we first come across those in, in those early third century manuscripts from, from around 200 or a bit later. So P 45 and P 75. Uh, the reason we come across them in those manuscripts and not in the earlier fragments, is because the titles of the, of the gospels, as is the case with lots of ancient documents come either at the beginning of a text or at the end, or both? Uh, so I've got a copy. I've got a, a a, a A, I'm looking at a picture here of, uh, P 75. Uh, and it has - It's the, the, the break between the end of Luke's gospel and the end of, and the beginning of John's gospel, and at the end of Luke's Gospel

**JD:** *Euangelian kata luca*

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah, so you have it, in this case, both at the end and the beginning. The last sentence of Luke, then the gospel according to Luke. Break of a line, then gospel according to John. In the beginning was the word, and when the word was with God, the Lord was God. So, so, uh, we tend to find Uh, titles of, of gospels at the, at the end and the beginning, especially in those early papyrus texts.

When we get onto the later, uh, later manuscripts, we find them in various other places as well. So, uh, I've got a big facsimile here of Codex Sinaiticus and in Codex Sinaiticus, you have them also like a running header at the top of the page.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Codex Sinaiticus is an awesome complete copy of the Bible - maybe even one of the ones Constantine commissioned - from the early-to-mid 300s.



**Simon Gathercole:** And then often in other manuscripts you have, you have, you might have a title page. Uh, at the beginning of the, at the beginning of the Codex, the beginning of a bound book. Um, we've got some examples of, of, of title pages. There are lots of ways in which you can represent a title, uh, um, in a manuscript. So, those are, those are a couple.

**JD:** Alright, so, um, they appear wherever we have a front page or an end page, like in the case of P75. Um, you have these titles. Are the titles consistent? Or as sometimes what we know as Luke's gospel, it's called the gospel of, uh, you know, I don't know, called the gospel of John instead of Luke or some other name attached to it.

**Simon Gathercole:** In manuscripts we don't have that variation. Sometimes in the early Church Fathers, they kind of misremember where a passage comes from. So, uh, you know, Origin might refer to a passage in Mark that comes in Matthew or vice versa. But in the manuscripts, they're very, they are very consistent. So we only have The Gospel of Luke at the end of the Gospel of Luke, and we only have the gospel according to John at the beginning of the gospel of, of John.

So the titles are amazingly consistent. Really, the, the only variation that we sometimes find is that instead of the full title, the gospel, according to Luke, say, sometimes you have the abbreviated form. Just according to Luke the gospel is it's assumed, you know, it's the gospel and this is

**JD:** you never get the abbreviation, the gospel.

**Simon Gathercole:** no, no,

**JD:** So these named title, the, the, the namings in the titles are sort of primary.

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I've looked at the manuscripts where up to up to about, um, AD 500. I can't vouch for every single manuscript after that. But those are the ones I've looked at at least.

## Tape

**JD:** Um, were these not just added, uh, to lend credibility to these documents? You know, so Matthew was a big figure in the ancient church. So they said, ah, let's call it Gospel According to Matthew.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Here's the big question I was talking about. Bart Ehrman and others reckon the titles were added for effect. But no one - not even Ehrman - has studied the question, and published about it, in the depth Simon Gathercole has.

---

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. I think that argument might work if we just had Matthew and John. Matthew and John were the two Gospels that were particularly prized in the early church because they were written by apostles, Matthew and John being apostles. But it makes Mark and Luke very odd choices.

If you were kind of trying to lend authority to a work Mark would be a very peculiar, uh, one to go for because he was a pretty minor figure in the early church. He's known to have fallen out with some of the apostles in, in the, in Acts. Um, and, and so he was, uh, um, an unusual choice. Luke would also be a very unusual choice because, He, he's just referred to in, almost in footnotes at the end of some of Paul's letters, but uh, is, is certainly not a, a, a key authority figure in the early church.

Um, so taken as a block, um, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John would be, you know, a surprising way to invent and attributing false authority.

**JD:** it would be better to say gospel according to Peter instead of Mark.

**Simon Gathercole:** yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**JD:** Yeah. Uh, yeah, it makes sense. Okay. But it's almost standard in scholarship. Half those books up there maybe, uh, would say the gospels were originally anonymous. So why, why do so many people say that? How did the idea become so popular?

**Simon Gathercole:** Well, I think there are two, there are two main reasons. First, that The Gospels themselves don't contain the author's names. So you don't have, at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, say, Luke to Theophilus, um, writing in order to assure you of the things that have been passed down to us.

Um, so Luke's name doesn't come embedded in the, in the, in the text of the gospel itself. Um, and the second, the second, the second, and, and that's the case with all, with all, with all of the gospels. And the second reason, uh, that people think that the gospel titles come later is that, when you, when we first get that evidence in, in the, in the second century for those titles, we have it in that standardized form, Euangelion, Cata, Matthion, Gospel according to Matthew, and so on.

And they're all called by that, um, that, that, that formulaic title. Um, and the argument, which, which in many ways is quite reasonable, is that you wouldn't have a gospel called the Gospel according to Matthew unless you also had other gospel writers, with names in their titles as well.

So according to is a very unusual form of a title in the ancient world. We would expect, as we often actually find in our own Bibles, the gospel of Matthew, um, or the words and deeds of Jesus. You know, Matthew's words and deeds is in the genitive or using, um, um, the English equivalent. Well, English is, you know, the word "of", um, but we, we only very, very occasionally have that sort of title with just "of", um, normally we have that according to.

And so the reason for that in the early church was that there was assumed to be one gospel, right? the saving message of Jesus. And that one gospel comes in four forms. The one gospel, you know, it can be according to Matthew, it can be according to Mark, it can be according to Luke, it can be according to John.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

Um, so that according to, which we're sort of used to as just a, you know, almost an empty phrase is, is very significant in the early church. It means Matthew's version of the gospel, Mark's a version of the gospel. So one other place where we find it is that, um, the o the Greek translation of the Old Testament is the gospel is the Old Testament, according to the 70, the 70 Greek translators.

Um, so, so, uh, um. You know, it's not the, the Old Testament of the seventies, they didn't write, they didn't write the Old Testament, but it's their version in Greek translation of the Old Testament. And so when you get the gospel title, the gospel, according to Matthew, it's that, that same kind of language of his version, uh, of the, of the text. [00:18:35] And you, you probably wouldn't get that title unless there were other versions known. You don't talk about a version of something if there's only one. Um, so, so there's some, there's some justification for thinking that the title in that form, uh, is, is later.

**JD:** You've written, and I'm, so I'm going to to quote you: Anonymity cannot be inferred from an absence of authorial self reference. In the body of the work, the sort of, I, Luke, write to you, Theophilus. And therefore the argument that the Gospels are anonymous because they do not contain the author's names is invalid, full stop. Okay, them's fighting words, for a scholar anyway, for a British scholar, that's feisty. Um, is there any evidence that the Gospels were originally nameless?

**Simon Gathercole:** Well, I don't think, I don't think so. Um, I think we can be part, we are partly misled, I think, by the rest of the New Testament. So when we come, when we come, as we often do first to Paul, um, we find Paul's letter to the, Romans, the first letter, Paul, to the, to those in Christ, in Rome, or to those in Christ, in Gla, in, in, in Ephesus or whatever it, you know, Paul has his, has his name at the beginning of every letter, uh, book of Revelation, John identifies himself as the author. Um, but what about the gospel? Why don't we have this? Why don't we have the same thing in the gospels? Well, the reason why we don't have the same thing in the gospels is because the gospels are a very different sort of letter, uh, a very different sort of document.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

They're not letters, uh, in which you need to identify yourself. Um, they're not apocalypses like John's Apocalypses, where you often - You usually have the person who's the recipient of revelation named.

They're basically, as we've been saying already, biographies. And in biographies, it's very, very unusual to have the author's name embedded in the text itself. So we've got stacks of biographies from antiquity. The person who I think probably wrote most was Plutarch. He never includes his name in any of those biographies, uh, of all the, of all the, uh, People he, he covers in his parallel lives.

**JD:** So they're anonymous too?

**Simon Gathercole:** So they're, they're anonymous too. Um, uh, although Plutarch might be a bit, a bit miffed if you, uh, uh, said he didn't write them. Um, similarly, um, Tacitus writes a biography of his father-in-law, but he doesn't mention his name in, in the, in the text itself. Um, so. For biographies, it's very common and biographies there just sort of mirror what's happening in history writing, uh, more generally as well. So, when we, when we come to the Gospels, it should be absolutely unsurprising that Luke and Matthew and John and Mark don't include their names in the work itself. So that, that's why I think it's totally insignificant, uh, as any sort of evidence for anonymous composition.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

The claim that the Gospels are all “anonymous” is no more accurate than insisting that a modern biography is anonymous on the grounds that the biographer’s name appears only on the front and back cover of the book, not in the body of the work. Of course the Gospel writers did not begin by writing, “I, Mark, now want to write about Jesus of Nazareth ...” But wherever we have a surviving front and back page of a Gospel manuscript—remember, these titles appeared either at the front, or at the back, or both—we find a title indicating the biographer’s name, and there

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

is absolute uniformity in the names attached to the works: euaggelion kata Markon, euaggelion kata Lukan and so on.

But ... we can go one better than even that.

---

### TAPE

**JD:** You write, attribution of the second gospel to Mark goes back to John the Elder in the first century. This cannot be more than about 20 years after the composition of the gospel. In light of this, it seems extremely unlikely that there was a time when Mark was not associated with the gospel. Talk me through this.

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. So we got three timeframes really to take into account here. Starting with the latest one and working backwards. We've got the, the timeframe of the person called Papias, who wrote a five volume work about the oracles of the Lord. And, uh, we don't have this whole work, but we have quotations from it.

Um, um, and so we have some, uh, some really important quotations of it from the time of, um, which go back obviously to Papias own time. He was writing probably in the 110s, 120s, 130s, so pretty, pretty early, um, as a, as a sort of testimony to, um, the origins of the Gospels, which he, which he touches on at several points.

So, around, let's say 125, Papias has written this passage in which he talks about how, um, Mark first wrote this. , uh, his gospel, but it was a bit, hi, higgledy PIGGLED. So Matthew came along and tidied it up and put it it in order.

Papias is referring there not to his own opinion, own opinion of uh, these gospels, but to what he heard from someone called John the elder, and this John the elder was, probably, um, alive in the, in, uh, probably passed this on to Papias in the latter stages of the first century, going back, say, 30 years. Um, and so John in, say, the 80s or 90s, um, Has

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

this information about Matthew and Mark and passes it on to, to, to Papias, who then writes it, writes it down later.

---

### READING

*The Elder used to say this: "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, though not in order, of the things either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards, as I said, followed Peter, who adapted his teachings as needed but had no intention of giving an ordered account of the Lord's sayings. Consequently, Mark did nothing wrong in writing down some things as he remembered them, for he made it his one concern not to admit anything that he heard or to make any false statement in them.*

#### **Fragments of Papias, no.15.**

---

**Simon Gathercole:** And by that, by, so if we're looking at John the Elder there, um, he, if he's, if he has this opinion, um, sort of in the 80s or 90s, uh, then that's very close to where we, where we have the composition, you know, to the composition of Mark, which was, you know, I don't know, 60s, 70s, um, so we're, with John the Elder we're getting back very close to the original composition of Mark, um, um, it's, it's hard to imagine that the attribution to Mark would have sprung up between the composition of Mark in say the 60s and 70s and John the Elder in the 80s or 90s.

---

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

### John Dickson (Studio)

Simon had similar – compelling – historical arguments along these lines for the composition of Luke's Gospel: why Luke's name had to have been attached to his Gospel from the beginning.

But ... for the sake of time, we've thrown that material into the Plus feed. Consider becoming a Plus subscriber, and you'll get it all. Sorry, I don't mean to be a tease. Well, I do a bit.

Well, that's the four Gospels – all from the first century, all now in the New Testament.

But what about the nearly 50 other Gospels and Gospel-like works from the second to fourth centuries?

Simon's an expert in that, too. In fact, he recently published a major new translation and study of these texts for Penguin Classics. It's called *The Apocryphal Gospels*, 2021.

So, that's where we're heading, after this short break.

---

**BREAK 2**

---

**MEDIA** - ['The Lost Gospels'](#)

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

We're listening to British Anglican priest and TV presenter Peter Owen-Jones in the 2008 BBC Documentary *The Lost Gospels*.



## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

It's fairly sensationalised but does a great job of laying out the stakes of what was considered a Gospel.

If the likes of The Gospel of Judas or Thomas had made it into the Bible, Peter argues, Christianity would look very different today ... or perhaps not even have survived at all.

I think that's probably right.

The contrast between the NT Gospels and the apocryphal and Gnostic Gospels is not just a time gap of a century or more; the view of reality is fundamentally different.

It's a theme explored in one of his other recent books - the one I mentioned at the top of the show - the 2022 volume *The Gospel and the Gospels: Christian Proclamation and Early Jesus Books*.

---

**JD:** The powerful thing about your new book is you then just ask the very simple question. What about all those other Gospels? How do they compare to this pattern of reflecting the earliest Christian preaching? So my two questions here are, one, for readers who don't have any clue about those other Gospels, what are they? And two, in what way do those other Gospels depart from this early pattern that you've detected?

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. So, um, we can't dispute that there are other Gospels, right? So, so, so there is, From you know, mostly from the, just taking examples from the second century, there's the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, um, the Gospel of Truth, uh, the gospel of, uh, Philip, um, the gospel, uh, the gospel of the Egyptians, uh, Marsian's gospel, uh, and the Gospel of Peter. Those are the seven that I refer to in the book.

Uh, they certainly existed in the second century, so Irenaeus, for example, the church father, writing in 180 or so, refers to the Gospel of

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

Judas and the Gospel of, um, uh, Truth. Um, Hippolytus, writing at the beginning, or pseudo Hippolytus, writing at the beginning of the third century, uh, refers to the Gospel of Thomas.

So there, there certainly were these other, um, things called Gospels. Um, and, and so the question is, you know. People have asked me, you know, are they as early as the other gospels, are they as historically reliable as the canonical gospels, uh, I don't really, I don't really get into that, but I get into the question, this question of whether they reflect that same early Christian preaching.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

If you want more info about how the Gnostic Gospels compare historically to the earlier NT Gospels, check out episode 30, Canon Fodder, with NT scholar Mike Bird and ancient historian Chris Forbes.

We'll put a link to the full thing in the show notes but for now, here's a throwback to a particularly relevant part of that episode.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

In 1945 a collection of manuscripts was uncovered in the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi, 500km south of Cairo. The thirteen codices (or books) were found in a storage jar buried underneath a boulder.

Bizarrely, the man who made the discovery, whose name was Muhammad Ali, took the priceless documents back to his home where his mother burned some of the pages as fuel for her bread oven.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

Fortunately, they were soon viewed by antiquities dealers and made available for scholarly assessment.

We have no firm information about who originally owned the books or about why they were hidden in this way sometime in the 4th century. Some have speculated that the collection was being protected from an inquisitorial Church eager to stamp out alternative Gospels (there's zero evidence for that), but it is just as likely that the leather bound books—a precious commodity in antiquity—were being hidden from thieves, invaders or just the elements.

After years of wrangling between collectors and museums, the codices are now kept safe in the beautiful little Coptic Museum of Cairo. I got to play with with them - the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip - when I filmed the Christ Files documentary.

They are classified by scholars as Gnostic Gospels because they all seem to follow a similar pattern of Jesus whispering some secret knowledge - Gnosis - to one of the apostles while they others weren't listening. The main piece of secret knowledge is that the God of the Jews, that is the God of creation, sucks, and by listening to these secret teachings contained in the document your spirit can escape this material world and rejoin the highest spirit of the universe. It's got more in common with Hinduism than Judaism, which is why most scholars think they're not very good sources for understanding the historical Jesus centuries earlier.

---

**Mike Bird:** Generally the reason books were included or excluded from the Canon was whether they could be tied to an apostolic author or an apostolic associates. So someone like Paul Peter or John Mark like that, you know, John Mark being an associate of Peter and Paul, whether they were Orthodox, whether they kind of, you know, um, work could be aligned with the, the rule of faith, you know, the basic summary of, of, of, of the Christian story of, you know, of God, Jesus, the church, that type of a thing. Um, and whether they were, they were actually used universally, you know, and where they were, they used in read in worship

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

around the, the church Catholic, you know, could you take a copy of the gospel of Matthew and go from North Africa all the way to Dalmatia, you know, from Spain all the way from, to Mesopotamia and would people know the book you were referring to, would they have the same sense of, uh, of belief and the authoritative status attributed to that book?

That was largely the basis in which, um, certain books were decided to be in and certain books were to be decided to, to be out of bounds. It was more about a developing consensus than a kind of top down imposition.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Check out the rest Canon Fodder. It's a fun episode—anything with Mike Bird is fun.

But Simon's interest is different ... and no less revealing: he's exploring whether these later Gospels make any attempt at all to preserve the earliest Christian proclamation, or whether they are, in fact, a conscious departure from that foundation.

---

**Simon Gathercole:** A lot of these gospels are actually coming up with a new definition, really, of who Jesus is. Um, especially in trying to sort of distance him from Judaism. Um, the four canonical gospels are really sort of embedded in the world of first century Judaism. Um, and describe Jesus in those terms, fulfillment of scripture, Jewish Messiah. Um, There seems to be, among these other, some of these other Gospel writers, a sort of distaste for associating Jesus too much with Judaism, and so, um, perhaps surprisingly, we, we have in a number of them, a sort of refusal to call Jesus Christ.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

The Gospel of Thomas doesn't mention the title Christ at all. Um, in the Gospel of Judas, the title Christ is the title of a demon, not a title of Jesus at all. Um, in, in the Gospel of the Egyptians, um, there are, um, there are a number of different figures called Christ. There's not a reluctance to call, um, Jesus Christ, but there are lots of Christ figures.

Um, Marcion has two Christs. Um, the one, one forecast by, by scripture is the sort of bad Christ of the Creator. Um, so Marcion has this, uh, you know, a surprising system in which there are, there's, there are two gods. There's the supreme god, and there's the god who made the world, and they're not the same god.

Um, and, and, and Jesus is the Christ of that superior god, nothing to do with, you know, the Old Testament god. Uh, so, in a number of these texts, you know, already the idea of Jesus being Christ is very problematic. Um, and so, um. None of them have the same understanding of Jesus as Messiah as the early Christian preachers would have assumed.

**JD:** And the death and the resurrection, how do they, uh, feature

**Simon Gathercole:** Well they, they, there's more variation there actually. So in the Gospel of Peter you have a clear statement of the resurrection on the third day. Uh, in some of the texts, uh, especially the, uh, Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Truth, you have a very strong idea, and, and Marcion's Gospel actually, you have a clear idea that Jesus death was saving, uh, had a saving effect, um, um, and whereas in others like the Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of the Egyptians Jesus wasn't really a physical human being, and so he couldn't have died so much. So my point in the book is not that the other Gospels have none of the early Christian kerygma, but they're just much more selective in how they, how they, uh, draw on it. Um, again, some of them draw on the title Christ, but not in the traditional sense of Messiah.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**JD:** So um, how do you value the Gnostic Gospels, um, as testimony to the earliest Christian preaching that we can historically verify?

**Simon Gathercole:** Well they don't, they don't offer much insight into what the earliest Christian preaching was. They offer insight into what particular groups valued theologically. So the Gospel of Truth and the Gospel of Philip, for example, are Uh, Valentinian documents go back to a movement started by, uh, a figure called Valentinus in the second century, and they have his particular theological emphases in them.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Valentinianism was a gnostic movement that emerged from Rome in the 2nd century.

It's a complicated system, but, basically, the secret knowledge - or gnosis - is that your soul has come from the infinite soul of the universe and is now trapped in a physical body in this horrible physical world. The goal is to escape the world, escape the body, and return to the light. That 'light', by the way, is NOT the God of the Jews, the God of creation. Gnostics hate creation and its god. No, the true light is more like Hinduism's Brahman. And, indeed, there was probably an 'eastern' connection in the Gnostic system of belief.

The point is: you find nothing like this in the earlier NT Gospels. Jesus the Jew loved creation, loved the Creator God, and promised bodily resurrection life in a renewed creation to all who turned to God for mercy.

---

**Simon Gathercole:** The Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of the Egyptians have, uh, um, are what are sometimes called classic Gnostic, uh, in their theology.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

So they, they have those particular emphases, uh, similarly with Marcion's Gospel. Uh, and so what we get, what we get an insight into from these Gospels, I think, is the kind of things that people argued about in terms of who Jesus was in the second century.

So they're, they're interesting documents of church history, but they're not really authoritative statements about who Jesus was, who, who the historical Jesus was and what the, what the apostles actually preached.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Let's press pause ... I've got a 5 minute Jesus for you.

What is the earliest account of Christian belief and proclamation—in the opinion of all experts?

Well, it's not found in the Gospels. It's in a letter of Paul.

Paul's letters were written to the middle of the first century, approximately 20-40 years after Jesus. That is a relatively small time gap by ancient standards (remember, Tacitus wrote his account of Tiberias almost 80 years after the emperor).

Yet, one passage from Paul takes us much closer, to within just a few of years of the crucifixion.

In his letter to the Corinthians, which we know was penned about AD 55 Paul, stops to remind his readers of the core message he preached to them when he was in Corinth five years earlier (AD 50).

He does this in the common ancient style of a pithy, memorable summary—what scholars call a 'creed'—which the Corinthians learnt by heart when Paul was with them.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

Primary schools in Paul's day used these same mnemonic devices to remember and learn the basics speech-writing.

The philosophical schools for adults, such as the School of the Epicureans, employed similar memorable summaries to lock into the minds of students the central arguments of Epicurus. (I happen to be writing an academic book on this very topic. I won't bore you with further details).

Jewish rabbis did the same thing. They made their disciples learn key summary statements by rote. It was a way of safeguarding the most important ideas. Josephus in the first century tells us, "the Pharisees had passed on (paradidōmi) to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses" (Antiquities 13.297).

The key terminology here—which was also used in philosophical schools—was 'to pass on' (paradidōmi) and 'to receive' (paralambanō): one was the duty of the teacher, the other the duty of the student.

Paul, himself a former Pharisee, employed the same practice to good effect among his non-Jewish hearers.

What is fascinating in the paragraph I'm about to quote is that Paul admits he is not the source of the oral summary or creed he passed onto his converts. Just as Paul paradidomi passed on this creed to the Corinthians when he was with them in AD 50, so, Paul says, he paralambano 'received' it from others when he first learnt about Christ. Given we know when Paul became a disciple, this statement must date to the early 30s AD. And with that ridiculous build up. Here is the creed, exactly as Paul was taught it, and as he passed it on:

ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς  
4 καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη  
καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς  
5 καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα·



## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

*That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.*

(1 Corinthians 15:1-5).

Scholars debate exactly when Paul 'received' this pithy creed. Some date it to the year of his conversion in AD 31/32 (in Damascus), others to AD 33/34 when Paul spent fifteen days in Jerusalem in conversation with the apostle Peter and Jesus' brother James (Galatians 1:18-20).

Whichever date we accept, James Dunn of the University of Durham speaks for many when he says: "This tradition (1 Cor 15:3-5), we can be entirely confident, was formulated as tradition within months of Jesus' death." (James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*. Eerdmans, 2003, 855.).

This is as close to the events themselves as a historian could hope for.

The significance of this creed is obvious. It establishes beyond reasonable doubt that at least six elements of the narrative of Jesus arose immediately after his death and can't have been part of some developing legend. Already by - let's say - AD 35 at the latest the following was part of formal Christian education and proclamation: (1) Jesus' status as ho Christos or Messiah, (2) his death for sins, (3) his burial in a tomb, (4) his resurrection after three days, (5) his multiple appearances, and (6) his appointment of Twelve apostles.

All of this was sufficiently well known to have become part of a formal summary of Christianity, which was passed onto converts far and wide.

This proves—in the historian's sense of the word 'prove'—that what was later written down in detail in the Gospels, and hinted at throughout Paul's letters, was already being proclaimed by missionaries and committed to memory by disciples within months of the events themselves.

You can press play now.

---

## TAPE

**JD:** You've made the case, um, that the gospels, these four gospels that we're talking about correspond in broad terms to the earliest Christian preaching

**Simon Gathercole:** I take as an example of the earliest Christian preaching, uh, what Paul reports in 1 Corinthians 15.

---

## John Dickson (Studio)

Here's the full passage I reflected on a moment ago. Thanks Dakotah ...

---

## READING 4

*Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas,[b] and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

*For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but*

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

*the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believe.*

### 1 Corinthians 15: 1- 11

---

#### TAPE

**Simon Gathercole:** So in that, that, that passages, the first 11 verses or so of 1 Corinthians 15 seem to me to be a, a kind of a real piece of gold, uh, a sort of key to understanding what early Christians preached. Uh, so, there he talks about the gospel, which he preached to them, by which they're saved, which they need to hold on to, and, uh, which he passed on to them as of first importance.

So he really stacks up the kind of, uh, the, the, Uh, the status of this message that he's describing, uh, and then at the end, afterwards, he goes on to say that this is what all of our, all of us apostles preach, and this is what you Corinthians have believed. Uh, so he really lays on thick the sort of status, uh, that this message, uh, that he's summarizing has, and the way he summarizes it is. That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures and appeared to Peter and the others. So those two central planks there, that Christ died for our sins and rose again, are two of the kind of key components of the gospel.

---

#### John Dickson (Studio)

1 Corinthians is thought to have been written around 53-54 AD, placing it within two decades of Jesus' life.

The passage in chapter 15 is often cited as proof that from *very early on*, Christians believed that Jesus was divine.

The Corinthians passage also echoes the two central events of the Gospels: Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

---

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**Simon Gathercole:** The other, the other, the other major components that I see in that, in that passage are. The person who did this, Christ, that's who Jesus is, he's not just, it's not just anyone who did this, it's a particular person with a particular biography, um, and that these two great events of Christ's death, the sins and resurrection on the third day are according to the scriptures. You have that repeated in that passage, both of them are according to the scriptures. So there's Christ. His death for our sins, his resurrection on the third day, and his fulfilment of scripture. So those are the sort of four key components of the earliest Christian preaching, uh, that that passage gives us, Uh, and all those four components come very prominently in the four New Testament Gospels, so there's no doubt there. If you just take Christ as, you know, Jesus identity as the Christ, for example. Well,

**JD:** first half of each Gospel seems to be building up his credentials

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, so, so in, in, uh, halfway through the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, um, you have Jesus, um, being declared as the Christ. Um, in, in John, it doesn't quite work in the same sequence, but John write, John says at the end, he's written this gospel so that you may believe that Jesus is The Christ, the Son of God. So, so in all four Gospels that, you know, that's pretty clear. Um, his death for our sins, uh, comes very clearly in, in the synoptic Gospels in the, um, in the ransom saying, you know, son of man came not to be served, but to give his life as a ransom for many. In the Eucharistic words, yeah, the Last Supper sayings. Um, and in John, in lots of different places in different imagery, like the Good Shepherd laying down his life for the sheep and, and, and lots of other sayings

**JD:** The Lamb of God,

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Yeah. And similarly, with the resurrection, they all refer to the resurrection. Mark doesn't have actual resurrection appearances, but

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

he's just as clear as the others that resurrection takes place on the third day.

---

### John Dickson (Studio)

Wait a minute.

You might be scratching your head here and racing to open up Mark's Gospel, where, contrary to what Simon says, there are some resurrection appearances narrated.

But ... if you look in the footnotes of most modern English translations, you'll find the words: "*The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses **do not** have verses 9–20.*"

Actually, Simon is right.

The last few paragraphs of Mark were added by some later scribe, who seems to have wanted to offer a kind of appendix summarising what the other three Gospels say about the resurrection appearances. As we have it, Mark's Gospel actually ends with the women running away from the empty tomb frightened. Full stop.

Does that mean Mark didn't know about the resurrection? Not for a second.

Many scholars - myself included - reckon the final page of Mark broke off before being copied widely. So we've lost his resurrection narratives.

So, where does that leave us?

---

**JD:** Am I right that even though Mark doesn't record resurrection appearances, there are those little references in, is it 14 and 15 where, where appearances are mentioned that they will happen?

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

**Simon Gathercole:** Yeah. 14 and then 16. The, the penultimate verse 16, seven, go and go. And you'll see Peter in Galilee. Mm-Hmm. Peter will, you'll see, you'll see Jesus in Galilee. Yeah. So there are, there are forecasts of, of resurrection appearances. Um, yeah. And, and of course fulfillment of the scriptures is, is kind of shot through all the, all four gospels. So I think all, all, you know, Matthew, mark, and Luke really, um. Follow that existing kerygma or as I call it, preach the preached message, uh, of, of the apostles. Um, not that they sort of have that kerygma in mind and that preached message in mind and think right. Chapter one, I've got to, you know, get work in something from that. It's just, I think it's more, more that they naturally, uh, think of the gospel in those terms that, that when they are writing gospels, they are preaching the gospel at the same time.

---

### **John Dickson (Studio)**

The earliest Christian proclamation – what Christians call ‘the gospel’ – is basically what’s found in the Gospels.

Unlike the later Gnostic books, the NT Gospels are our clearest window into what the first Christians were saying about what’s important to know about Christianity.

And it’s basically ... Jesus’ life and teaching showing him to be the Messiah; his death by crucifixion, which from the beginning was interpreted as a sacrifice for our wrongdoing; his burial in a tomb (something all four Gospels give quite a bit of information about); and his resurrection and appearances to eyewitnesses who started proclaiming this stuff pretty much instantly.

You may not believe all that, but the historical point is: that’s the original form of Christianity.

## Season 11: Jesus' Biography

There is no earlier form of the Faith. There are just later additions, variations, and perversions of that Faith over the coming centuries.

But the core is the core—and it's in the Gospels.

And so, for me, the punchline of talking to Simon is simple: whether you believe or doubt, there is no more effective and intellectually responsible way to get back to original Christianity – to understand the Faith that shaped much of our world – than to read one of the NT Gospels.

To be clear, I don't think history can prove the details of Christianity. History isn't like that. History is only good at establishing what you might call the general plausibility of sources or an event or person from the past.

Historical analysis can lead us to the broad conclusion that the New Testament Gospels are our best window into the life of Jesus of Nazareth and, therefore, the earliest Christian message.

Pick up Mark, maybe – that's the briefest of the Gospels. Or Luke, the longest (in word count). Neither is anonymous. They were written by people in direct contact with eyewitnesses. Matthew contains all of the greatest hits of Jesus - Love your enemy, Our Father in Heaven, A tree is known by its fruit, and so on – or John, the most philosophically profound of the Gospels, written by someone who knew Jesus personally.

I don't think it matters. These four are the earliest. These four inspired the Gospel-writing industry that went nuts in the two centuries after they were written.

These four provide the window into the original Christian proclamation. They give us front row seats to – what we at Undeceptions reckon is – the greatest show on earth.

## **CREDITS**

Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dickson, produced by Kaley Payne, and directed by Mark Hadley.

Sophie Hawkshaw is on socials and membership.

Alasdair Belling is a writer and researcher.

Siobhan McGuinness is our online librarian.

Lyndie Leviston remains my wonderful assistant.

Santino Dimarco is Chief Finance and Operations Consultant.

Editing by Richard Hamwi.

Our voice actor today was Dakotah Love.

Special thanks to our series sponsor Zondervan for making this Undeception possible.

Undeceptions is the flagship podcast of Undeceptions.com - letting the truth out.

---