

# What Jesus Taught in the Bible and in *A Course in Miracles*

by Harry McDonald

How does what Jesus reportedly taught in the *Bible* compare with what he teaches in *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM)? First it needs to be identified what he taught in the *Bible* and the circumstances surrounding the recording of those teachings. It is assumed that the *New Testament* is consistent in what is taught about Jesus' teachings, but that is not the case. That is especially true when looking at translations, audiences, and interpretations through the centuries. *Bible* scholars have made many important discoveries in the past half century that shed light on the sources and ages of texts in the *New Testament*. For purposes of this short article, where brevity is important, the considerations will be narrowed to the Gospels, especially Matthew, Luke, and Mark that are commonly called the synoptic Gospels, or "seen through one eye".

The reason the synoptic Gospels are chosen is that the writings of Paul, though written earlier than the synoptics, were reflective of a man who did not know Jesus personally, but had a significant spiritual experience of him. The Gospel of John, though very beautiful, is reflective of a more fully developed theology than the synoptics and, according to most scholars, is a later creation. Other early sources, like the book of Thomas, are obviously outside the scope of an article about the *Bible*.

The earliest synoptic gospel, Mark, is also the shortest and the most simple. It was likely written in Rome just before the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD, but not "published" until after the fall. It does not include a virgin birth story or a Resurrection story except as added later. It has a climax in the Crucifixion and the suffering. It does not outline a doctrine per se, but is more interested in establishing Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, which is problematic without a virgin birth.

Mark's main importance for this article is that it was a source for both Matthew and Luke. Matthew also used material from a lost sayings document or tradition designated "Q" by scholars and special traditions, designated "M." Matthew seems to be written to Jews. Luke was written a little later to Greeks to show Jesus as a universal savior. The author of Luke was also the author of Acts. Much of what is related in Matthew is also in Luke, but Luke also has some unique stories.

The major section of Matthew that gives teachings is the Sermon on the Mount section, and in Luke the parallel is the Sermon on the Plain section. The contrasts in the subtleties of these two sections could be a whole article, but here are some ideas about Jesus' teachings:

The Beatitudes sections rejoice at a state where those who hurt or are poor or are falsely accused will receive blessings. Luke says that the rich and full have already had their reward (6:24). In fact Luke in general even sends woe to those who are well thought of instead of falsely accused (6:26).

Both Matthew and Mark state to love your enemies, not to resist evildoers, turn the other cheek, give more than is asked to accusers, do not judge others, etc. (Matt 5: 33-46, Luke 6:27-37) The Golden Rule is also espoused by both. (Matt. 7: 12, Luke 6:31)

Matthew seems to talk about what we call projection today in that Jesus is reported to say that if you angry with a sibling you will liable to judgment with insults getting even more of a consequence. (3: 21-26) There is a line in the Lord's prayer from both Matthew and Luke that says, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors (or trespasses or sins) that demonstrates the necessity of forgiving what we have projected onto others. (Matt 6:7-12, Luke 11: 1-4)

Both Matthew and Luke say that we cannot serve both Heaven and the world, that we should take no thought for clothes or food, and that by choosing God all other things are added unto us. (Matt 6: 19-34, Luke 12:22-34)

Luke and Matthew both say that we are recognized by the good in our heart that causes good works. Matthew goes so far as to say that Jesus will not recognize those who cast out demons or prophesied in his name or did other deeds of power unless they did good deeds from a heart that values God over the world. (Matt 7: 15-23, Luke 6: 43-46)

Mark did not contribute to any of these major points except for the Lord's prayer (11: 25-26) and judging (4:24-25). John, written much later, did not include any of these references. Luke and Matthew's inclusion of earlier sources could come from eye witnesses even though both Gospels were written after the fall of Jerusalem some 40 to 50 years or more after the Crucifixion. Most of these citations also carry a promise of punishment. It is not always clear whether the punishment is a natural result of those actions or will be done by God. The actual message could also have been corrupted by followers, given its later date, who wanted to put more teeth in it to keep followers in line during times of persecution and torture.

The parallels with ACIM are striking except modern psychological terms are used in ACIM, and there would never be a reference of God giving punishment. God in ACIM is loving and steadfast while it is we who have made a choice to think differently and create illusions that can never endanger reality. Also, ACIM never demonizes being wealthy, but it does say not to put our faith in money, medicines, food, or earthly things (Lesson #76). The admonition to take no thought for what is worn or eaten in ACIM could be considered a way of giving the ego less power and turning all guidance over to the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus says he will make all small decisions for us, if we allow it, with his guidance influencing our big decisions (T-2:VI.1:3). The preferred way in ACIM is for us to be the hands and feet of Christ (lesson #353) and turn actions over to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The "seek first the kingdom of Heaven" idea is mirrored in lesson 151 and also the twin lessons of 128 & 129. These sections and others state that our earthly desires are false solutions to grief caused by our separation from God. The correction is in seeking God so that all our reasonable needs are met automatically.

The point about letting good works come from the pure heart connected to God and that using personal "power," even in Jesus' name is not widely recognized as a major concept in ACIM even though it is there. The early encouragement to listen, learn, and do is part of Jesus' great Crusade and expresses that actions should be the result of listening and learning from Jesus' guidance. Most teachers of ACIM agree that the emphasis of ACIM is on forgiveness, but not as many emphasize that forgiveness requires acting from a loving center with a love that reflects God's unconditionality and that miracles are an involuntary reaction. Consciously selected miracles are seen as misguided (miracle principal #5).

In conclusion the major ideas of not judging and recognizing a spiritual reality, Heaven, as separate from this world are the same thoughts that Jesus uses in ACIM with modern terms. The Crucifixion seems to be the supreme example of turning the other cheek and loving your enemies while the Resurrection is the triumph of God's love over adversity and even death. They become the glowing picture of putting faith in the energy of God's unconditional love (Heaven) over this world. The difference is that now we are told that it is no longer necessary for us to participate in useless journeys (T-4. In.), but it is obvious that the forgiveness we are asked to practice is not ordinary or without help and direction. Nor can we forgive without actually giving God's unconditional love to each other. What Jesus taught as a man in the earliest sources in the Gospels certainly appears the same as what he teaches in ACIM once the inconsistency of unloving punishment is brushed off like later added rust from a strongly loving message.

**Harry McDonald** is a former school principal and a longtime student/teacher of *A Course in Miracles*.