

## UNIT 1: “Now we see in a mirror dimly...”

### I. FIRST THINGS FIRST

#### A. Why a Course Called “Yeshua...”?

1. The name, “Jesus” is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua/Jeshua from the Old Testament language of the Jewish scriptures and Aramaic, the language of their common speech:

*“Our fathers in turn brought it in with **Joshua** when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David...” **Acts 7:45***

*“For if **Joshua** had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.” **Hebrews 4:8***

2. It is derived from the angel’s announcement to Joseph in a dream, telling him that Mary’s son was Israel’s long-awaited savior:

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name **Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins.” **Matthew 1:18-21***

3. The name includes the idea of God providing salvation, “He (or Jah) saves.”
4. It is pronounced “yeh-**shoo**-ah,” and we transliterate this in English as “Yeshua.”

#### B. Why a “Course” on Jesus?

1. Jesus is the foundation of our faith, *not* the “founder” of it (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20)
2. The “Gospel (i.e. “good news”) of Jesus Christ” (Mk 1:1) is *not* a reference to Jesus’ “Good News”; He *is* the “good news”!
3. Jesus is the means of our justification (Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:22-24; 8:11).
4. Jesus is also the profile of our sanctification ; His likeness is what God wills to progressively transform us into. (Rom. 8:29; 2 cor. 3:18; 4:7-112).
5. Jesus is the One whose likeness should be the goal of the Church’s vision of ministry to itself (Col. 1:28-29; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 2:12-15).

#### C. Avoiding the Two Extremes

1. Over-simplification:
  - a. Jesus is merely a savior — focusing on his death and resurrection (the conservative’s tendency).
  - b. Jesus is merely a “sage” — focusing on his life and teachings (the postmodern’s tendency).
2. Over-complication:
  - a. Jesus is reduced to a theological subject to be studied
    - His “hypostatic union”: the relationship of Jesus’ two natures
    - His impeccability: whether or not Jesus could sin and the nature of his temptations
    - The “kenosis”: what exactly did the eternal Son “surrendered” in the Incarnation

- The trinity: his place in the Godhead

## II. THE TASK BEFORE US

### A. The Difficulty of the Task

#### 1. The Material “problem”:

- We have no tangible artifacts typical of many historical figures (E.g. Alexander, Caesar, Tutankhamen, etc.); perhaps because archeology is *not* the study of the ancient poor, but the ancient rich.
- Our most extensive sources are all documents written by followers of Jesus.

#### 2. The literary “problem”:

##### a. The four Gospels, as literary sources:

- They defy categorization by genre - what are they, really? (I.e. If you were a librarian, where would *you* shelve them?)
- They defy simple collaboration of composition:
  - ✓ This is one of the biggest areas of scholarly study of the Gospels.
  - ✓ No other section of Scripture (except Genesis 1-11) has undergone such scrutiny and criticism.
  - ✓ There are over 700 Christian books available that deal with “The Gospels.”
- They defy a clear chronology: the Gospels are not “blogs” or “journals” following a linear sequence:

“Sermon on the mount” material	in Matthew	In Luke
beatitudes	5:3-12	6:20b-23
salt of the earth	5:13	14:34-35a
light of the world	5:14-16	8:16
law and the prophets	5:17ff	16:16ff
love for enemies	5:43-48	6:27, 32-36
Lord’s Prayer	6:9-13	11:2-4
treasures in heaven	6:20ff	12:33ff
a tree and its fruit	7:16ff	6:43ff
the two builders	7:24-27	6:47-49

Excerpted from: *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospels*, Wenham & Walton, page 65.

- b. They defy easy contextualization:
    - it takes serious work to understand them.
    - geography, climate, ethnicity, history, and language all shape the meaning of the text of the Gospels.
  3. The “times” problem:
    - a. We are seeking to comprehend the life of someone who lived during a time of emperors and peasants.
    - b. We are dependent upon sources written in an illiterate, agricultural culture.
    - c. We are seeking to understand universally a story that is both provincial and parochial in its setting.
    - d. The world described in the Gospels was 2000 years old in Jesus’ day!
- B. The Gravity of the Task
1. It is possible to have a wrong “Jesus”: (“another” in Greek is “another of the same kind.”)

*“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims **another Jesus** than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a **different spirit** from the one you received, or if you accept a **different gospel** from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.” 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4*

*“...not that there is another one [gospel], but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:7-9*

    - a. The “Jesus” of Mormonism:

*“That Lucifer, the son of the morning, is our elder brother and the brother of Jesus Christ...” (Mormon Doctrine, pp. 163-64)*

*“Jesus got married at Cana and had many wives, Martha, Mary and others. He also had many children...” (Journal of Discourses, Vol 1 345-346)*
    - b. The “Jesus” of The Watchtower:

*“Michael the archangel is no other than the only begotten son of God, now Jesus Christ...” (New Heavens and New Earth, pp. 30-31)*
    - c. The “Jesus” of Islam:

*O followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of Marium is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which He communicated to Marium and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.*  
**Sura 4:171**
    - d. The “Jesus” of Judaism (taken from: <http://www.jewfaq.org/looking4.htm>):

*“It is important to understand that Jesus is simply not a part of Judaism. He is irrelevant to our religion. To ask a Jew, “why don’t you believe in Jesus?” is like asking a Christian, “why don’t you believe in Zeus?”*

*“...The Jews of Rome weren’t looking for an incarnated god who would die and absolve them of their sins, because the idea of sin and its punishment and concern about salvation aren’t at the heart of Judaism, the way they are in Christianity.*

*“But though Jesus and his religion may be part of G-d’s plan for the world, the general consensus among the rabbis regarding Jesus is not favorable. On the same page where he made the remark above, Rambam commented that Daniel 11:14 (regarding people who try to establish the vision but stumble and fall) is a reference to Christianity, saying:*

*‘Is there a greater stumbling block than [Jesus]? All the prophets foretold that the messiah would redeem the Jews, help them, gather in the exiles and support their observance of the commandments. But he caused Jewry to be put to the sword, to be scattered and to be degraded; he tampered with the Torah and its laws; and he misled most of the world to serve something other than G-d.’”*

- e, In an age of passion and emotion, it’s vital to remind ourselves that we can be sincerely wrong about Jesus *and* ourselves!

*“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation. “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **Revelation 3:14-20***

*“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal [Gk = passion] for God, but not according to knowledge.” **Romans 10:1, 2***

2. If Jesus is, the “others” aren’t!
- The monotheism of Christianity excludes the monotheism of Judaism and Islam (and vice versa).
  - The common threads of these three religious streams blurs their exclusivity (E.g. ancestry, God’s sovereignty, separation of God from nature).
  - One’s theology of Jesus affects every doctrine of the Christian faith; it isn’t merely one of them:
    - God
    - creation
    - humanity
    - sin
    - Satan, angels and demons
    - salvation
    - eternity

C. “Yehua in Four Dimensions”

- Four ways of “looking”:
  - The “world” behind the text: history and culture
  - The “world” of the text: language, vocabulary, grammar
  - The “world” around the text: implications and applications for the believing community.
  - The “world” before the text: personal application

2. Four things to “look” at:
  - a. Jesus as Revelation: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* **John 1:14**
  - b. Jesus as Reconciler: *“...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* **2 Corinthians 5:19**
  - c. Jesus as Role Model: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* **Romans 8:29**
  - d. Jesus as Rectifier: *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;”* **Isaiah 61:1**
3. Four “windows” to look through:
  - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
4. Forging a Four-Dimensional Method:
  - a. We are going to seek to use all four ways of looking.
  - b. We are going to look through all four windows.
  - c. We are going to look at two of the four things:
    - Jesus as Revelation
    - Jesus as Role Model