

# (Christian History) 7. Important People and Writings

by David Guzik

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*This sermon explores the lives and contributions of several influential Christian thinkers, including Cyprian, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:3-12, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 10:7-10, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 22:37-39, Luke 6:38, Romans 13:13

**Topics:** "Christian History", "Spiritual Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, the gatekeeper rebukes some thieves and sends them away, but Francis is not pleased with this approach. He tells the gatekeeper to find the needy men and provide them with food, emphasizing that people are drawn to the kingdom of God through kindness, not rebukes. Meanwhile, Francis starts praying and questioning how long he can resist. Suddenly, he hears children playing a game nearby, and they repeatedly say, 'Take it and read.' This phrase resonates with Francis, and he finds a copy of the Scriptures nearby. He opens it randomly and reads a passage from Romans 13 about avoiding drunkenness and carousing. This ignites a fire within him, and he begins preaching the gospel with his followers, emphasizing worshiping God, repentance, generosity, forgiveness, love for neighbors and enemies, humility, and Christian purity. Their preaching, though simple, addresses the needs of people directly. Francis and his followers become a source of conviction for the community, and they face consequences for challenging the consciences of their generation. However, their gentle concern for people's basic needs leads many to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. Francis is also known for his love for all creation, as he even preaches to birds and swallows, who quiet down to listen to him.

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## Transcript

What we want to consider in this lecture together is the same period of time that we've been considering for the last several lectures, this period that we're calling the Christian Empire, which we've observed before, is taking an absurdly long period in trying to group it all together, basically from the conversion of Constantine in the year 312 to the Reformation approximately the year 1500, but actually it was a little bit after that, of course. And in this particular section, we are moving on from the things we considered before. We considered, first of all, some of the general trends and characteristics of the Christian Empire period, how Christianity became officially allowed, then officially supported by the Roman Empire.

Then we discussed how Christianity retreated to the monastery, and we talked about the monastic movement. Thirdly, we spoke of the emergence of the Roman Catholic Church and the institution of the papacy. Then we moved on to more of the important events and challenges of the period, the Aryan heresy in the Council of Nicaea, the dispute about the humanity of Jesus in the Council of Chalcedon, tension between Rome and Constantinople, between West and East, of course, the emergence of Islam and the Islamic invasion of Europe, the Crusades and the Mongol invasion.

Each one of these were very critical turning points in European history, and the history of the Middle Ages would likely have been much different if they turned out in different ways. Okay, so in this particular lecture, we're going to consider the important people and writings of this period of time that we know as the Christian Empire. Now, one thing that you have to know is this is almost an insultingly short list and short look at these important people and writings, because one of the things that the Middle Ages was known for was the phenomenon of scholasticism.

This was the time where theology was regarded as the queen of the sciences. I mean, believe it or not, there was a time when theology was regarded as the most important subject at a university, and when people studied it with great passion, with great energy, a lot of these writers wrote tremendous volumes, I mean, huge works that examined issues theologically from every conceivable aspect. Now, it's from this medieval era of scholasticism that people sort of spin the idea off of a bunch of scholars sitting around discussing, you know, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, if you've ever heard that expression before.

Well, in some regard, that was true. They would get into the minutiae of certain issues so greatly and so deeply that sometimes it seemed like they were talking about nothing and discussing it in that way. But really, there is much to admire in their great passion.

Although I will have to say, when you read many of these great medieval scholars, it's hard reading. They're very hard sometimes to work their way through, just because of the phrasing they use, the syntax they use, the way they write. It's work.

It's labor to make its way through it. But if anybody has especially an interest in real theology, in apologetics, in philosophy, these are names that you should become aware with in the span of Christian history. And so we're going to take just, again, a very, very brief look at some of these people, regard this as a real introduction to who they are and to what they have done.

And so in this list that we're going to take a look at, first of all, beginning at sort of the beginning of our Christian empire period, Cyprian, and then Athanasius, and then John Chrysostom, and then Augustine, and then Anselm, and then Thomas Aquinas. So first of all, we want to take a look at this man, Cyprian. Cyprian was a man who really reacted against corruption in the church.

He brought about the idea that you should refuse to accept baptism unless it was administered by a godly, pure priest. Now, of course, this made a great debate in the early church, didn't it? Because people really wondered, what is the power in baptism? Do you have to be baptized by sort of a duly consecrated person in order to be legitimately considered a part of the church and baptized in the church? There's something you have to understand about much of Christian theology in regards to baptism, is that an awful lot of the church, both Catholic and some Protestant groups, essentially see baptism as the membership ceremony by which you join the church, okay? That's why they baptize babies, essentially, okay? Because why should you deny babies membership in the church, right? The idea is this, and of course a lot of this

comes from Augustine and his writings. The idea is this, is that you can't be--well, let me put it to you in a phrase that Augustine used.

He said, you can't have God for your father unless you have the church for your mother, right? I mean, the idea is that if you don't belong to the church--and he would say the invisible church, although he would connect it with the visible church, definitely--then you're not a real believer, then you're not a child of God. Well, therefore, being a part of, being accepted as a member into the church--and of course in the medieval times we're talking about the Roman Catholic Church--this was extremely important, and baptism was the means by which they do it. Now, Cyprian argued very much for the idea that unless you were baptized by a godly, pure priest who held the correct doctrines, your baptism was not valid.

That Cyprian was such a godly man and a martyr that it was tough for Augustine to show that although Cyprian had the right heart, he didn't always have the right ideas and teachings. We would say very much, Cyprian, you were wrong on this point. The efficacy of baptism is not in who it administers it.

The efficacy of baptism is bound up in the person who's being baptized in their true commitment of faith. That's where the power in baptism lies. Well, Cyprian was a very good man who gave credit to a bad idea.

And so this is something that Cyprian wrote in his letter to the Lady of Carthage. He says, I hear, however, that some of the elders, neither mindful of the gospel nor considering what the martyrs have written to me, nor reserving to the bishop the honor due as priesthood and chair, have already begun to communicate with the lapsed and offer oblation for them and to give them the holy Eucharist, whereas they ought to by a due course attain these. Here we see Cyprian contending for the purity of the church, dealing with who? The lapsed.

We've already discussed what the lapsed are, right? Those are people who essentially failed and compromised under persecution, denying the Lord Jesus Christ when the sword was put to their throat, so to speak, or perhaps literally. Well, here Cyprian is arguing against accepting them back into the church too soon, too quickly. He says, whereas they ought to by a due course to attain these.

Well, on this particular issue, Cyprian was correct, wouldn't we say? I mean, yes, you can't just treat the lapsed as if they did nothing. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to treat them as if they could never be saved. And so Cyprian, again, very much a godly man, but with some bad ideas that had some bad repercussions that Augustine had to battle against.

The next person we want to consider here is Athanasius. Athanasius wrote many important works, including *On the Incarnation of the Divine Word*, *Orations Against the Arians*, and *Against Apollinarians*. Athanasius stood strong for the truth regarding the nature of God as a trinity, even when Arianism was in vogue.

Athanasius suffered severely for his strong stand. He was exiled five different times as a form of persecution, and he was nearly killed several times. You know, he's the great man of whom we spoke of before, where he was nicknamed Athanasius *Contramundum*, Athanasius Against the World.

He was a man of tremendous steadfast strength in the Lord, and of course, a good scholar as well. Here's a little look at one of the things he wrote, Athanasius to the Bishop of Egypt. He says, The impiety and godless heresy of the Arians have long been known everywhere and to all, for the period of their existence has not been a short one.

It is thirty-six years since the latter were pronounced heretics, and they were ejected from the church by the judgment of the whole Ecumenic Council. Now, what Ecumenic Council is he referring to there? The Council of Nicaea, correct? And he's saying, Look, it's thirty-six years now after the Council of Nicaea, and yet still, the Arians are still going on and still preaching their things, and he, of course, is launching a great protest against this. I think it's very interesting when you just look at the manner in which these guys wrote.

Notice, The impiety and godless heresy of the Arians have long been known everywhere, and then he goes on. Now, you have to say, that's pretty strong speaking, isn't it? You know, people don't talk that way anymore, right? Although I have to say, you get more and more of that kind of talk today. Isn't it an interesting phenomenon in the world today, where over the internet, when people can, so to speak, sort of hide behind their keyboard, they can talk very bold and very strong, you know, and they can just really be tigers behind the keyboard.

So you'll find people who speak, you know, with great critical and strong words today, but they don't do it from the courage of an Athanasius. They do it from the anonymity behind a keyboard on the internet. And so it's very interesting where you see that same sort of strong speech sort of coming back into our cultural experience, but in a completely different way, isn't it? It's not coming back with the great courage of a man like Athanasius.

And so again, a great man stood strong for the stood strong against many different opponents. The next person we want to consider is John Chrysostom. Chrysostom, well, you just take his name.

He was one of the great preachers of his day. His very name means golden mouth. Chrysostom.

He excelled, especially in his sermons, in ethical application. And his very strong stand for the truth and willingness to expose sin got him into trouble with the emperor's wife, Eudoxia. I always forget how to say her name correctly.

I hope I'm saying it correctly. Eudoxia, who was the emperor's wife, and she had him exiled. He was very much a man who was bold and famous for the eloquence and for the power of his preaching.

It's interesting here on the little presentation we have on the PowerPoint. It mentions that he was kidnapped from Antioch to be installed as the Patriarch of Constantinople. That's basically true.

I mean, he was just, people wanted him so bad to be the Patriarch of Constantinople, which of course was the leading city in the Eastern Church. They forcibly, they basically kidnapped him and forced him to come over and take this office, which he was reluctant to take. The next person we want to consider along is the great scholar, of course, whom you have heard of before, and this is the man Augustine.

Augustine's great works include Confessions and the City of God, of course, many other works as well. Augustine was a brilliant lawyer and teacher who had a wonderful conversion from the dualistic pagan philosophy of Manichaeism. He was a prominent bishop and the most influential theologian and apologist of his day.

And you can say that the impact of Augustine is, even to this day, in many ways, Luther's Reformation and modern Reformed theology is a return back to Augustinianism. Augustine was a radical predestinationist. And this was very much in the minds of Calvin and Luther as they taught and promoted these They very much knew Augustine back and forth, and they really believed and bought into what he taught.

Look, it's no secret, or it's no mystery, I should say, that's a better word. It's no mystery as to why Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk. He came from the order of monks that were sort of following after Augustine and his teachings.

So Augustine taught clearly and strongly on the ideas of the supremacy of God's grace, on predestination, on the inability of man, and on the initiation of God in saving man. And one interesting thing about Augustine is, I don't have any doubt why he felt so profoundly indebted to the grace and to the power of God, because of his own remarkable conversion experience. I mean, Augustine was a man who's sort of raised by a Christian mother, but he went off and he lived his life, and he was kind of a womanizer and a partier, and he lived his life a great, brilliant lawyer and thinker.

I mean, he had a good career in front of him, and he struggled back and forth. But one of the reasons why he just couldn't give his life to Jesus Christ was because he struggled with sin. And finally, God brought him to a very critical experience, where actually he was just sort of tormented.

He was sitting in a garden, you know, thinking about the torment of his soul, and should I give my life to Jesus Christ or not? How long will I resist? And then he heard some kids playing a game nearby, and the children were playing the game. And as part of their game, the children would call out to one another, take it and read, take it and read. Well, for some reason, you know how the Holy Spirit can just grab a word and make it alive to somebody's heart.

The Holy Spirit grabbed that word to Augustine, and he looked around, and there was a copy of the Scriptures right near him. And so he picked it up, and he read it, and I don't know if it was in page form or scroll form, I don't really know, but he opened it up. He just opened it up to wherever he could, and he instantly read the passage in Romans chapter 13, I believe, which says, you know, don't, no more in drunkenness and carousing, no more in living like the world.

Put on the armor of light and go, and it just spoke to him so powerfully that he was converted right then. And he had a real interesting time living his Christian life after that because of his ungodly past. There's a great story of Augustine.

One day, sometime after he's converted, he's walking down the street, and who should, you know, come up and meet him on the other side of the street, but one of his old girlfriends, one of these girls that he used to carouse with. And so as he meets him, you know, the girlfriend says, oh, Augustine, great to see you. Wow, you know, maybe we should get together again.

And Augustine turns around, he starts walking away from the girl. He starts moving away like a frightened guy. And she goes, what's wrong, Augustine? You know, it's only me.

And he said, I'm not me anymore, which is a great idea. You know, he said, look, I'm not the same guy that used to carouse with you, young lady. And so I have nothing to do with that anymore.

Augustine really was profoundly changed by the grace of God. And I have no doubt that this was some influence on his own very strong stand on the ideas of predestination and total depravity and the inability of man, because he felt those things very personally in his own experience. We have a quote here from Augustine that we should take a look at.

He writes in his work, In the Spirit and the Letter, he says, A man's free choice avails only to lead him to sin if the way of truth be hidden from him. And when it is plain to him what he should do and to what he

should aspire, even then, unless he feels love and delight in it, he does not perform his duty, nor undertake it, nor attain to the good life. But to the end that we may feel this affection, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, not through the free choice which springs from ourselves, but through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

Here is a passage where he's emphasizing the idea of man's inability to choose God without the Spirit of God working upon his life. And so Augustine had this very strong influence, not only on theology in his own day, as he battled against many different groups, the Donatists, the Manichaeans, and especially the Arians and the Pelagians. He was a real warrior in a theological sense, but of course his theological ideas had great repercussions onward.

I've heard some people assess Augustine and say that he was the greatest theologian, or maybe not greatest, let's just say the most influential theologian of the Church since the Apostle Paul. And I would say actually it would be hard to argue against that, because when you see Augustine's effects in Reformation theology, one would have to agree as well. Then going on to the next person that we're talking about, and I want you to notice the years we're talking about here with Augustine, we're actually talking about the late 4th century and the early 5th century, aren't we? Now we're going to fast forward about 500 years to a man named Anselm.

Anselm lived, of course, in the 11th and 12th century, and he spoke of this theme of why God became man was one of his famous works. Anselm was a brilliant philosophical theologian. Now we're getting into the period of time where it really excelled in what we would call scholastic theology.

It's really kind of an interesting dynamic that developed after the fall of the Roman Empire. We spoke previously of how monasteries became essentially islands of learning in the midst of a generally uneducated society, right? There were no longer schools, there were no longer universities, there were no longer training places. As there were in the Greek and Roman world, basically the only institutions for learning, at least through much of the Middle Ages, were among monasteries and in the cloisters.

Well, Anselm, as being a monk and being one of these scholastic theologians, giving all of his attention to theology and the study of it, well, he really excelled to great heights and was a brilliant, although sometimes very hard to follow, apologist for the faith. He developed the idea of what we call the ontological argument for God's existence. Do you know what the ontological argument is for God's existence? Basically, it says that we know there's a God because there must be a supreme being.

I mean, that's basically his idea. There has to be a supreme being. And he goes through great, well, can I just say, very complicated and intricate and brilliant arguments to demonstrate why there must be a supreme being.

And so that was his work. Here's an example of Anselm, and I think you get a little picture of what we're talking about here. He says here, So truly, therefore, do you exist, O Lord my God, that your non-existence is inconceivable, and with good reason? For if a man's mind could conceive something better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator and judge him, which is utterly absurd.

In other words, Anselm argued very powerfully, although some people don't buy the argument, that God is necessary because his non-existence is inconceivable. I don't think I can do justice to his argument right here. You'd have to pick up Anselm, get yourself some Anselm, get yourself a good, strong triple or quadruple latte and attack him.

You're going to need all your powers of thought to wade through a guy like Anselm, as you will with the next guy that we're going to consider. And again, I just kind of want you to get an appreciation of what a brief treatment we're giving of these guys, right? This is just the barest of surveys. We could spend very legitimately an entire Bible college semester just talking about the theology of Anselm.

I mean, you really could. Or Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas, again, a couple hundred years after Anselm, his great work, among many, was the Summa Theologica, in other words, the sum of theology.

You could say that Thomas Aquinas was the Babe Ruth of scholasticism. In other words, man, he just hit home runs all the time. He was a prodigious worker whose philosophical system is known as Thomism and is still influential.

Aquinas was a very, very critical thinker. And again, one of these guys sort of in the mold of Anselm who knew how to take a subject philosophically and look at it from absolutely every conceivable angle. I mean, he was a brilliant man in that regard.

And so Aquinas had a huge influence. Notably, here's an example of Aquinas. He says, I reply that man was bound through sin in two respects.

First, in servitude to sin. The devil, by inducing man to sin, had overcome him, and therefore man was assigned to the devil as a slave. Secondly, in respect to the incurring of a penalty according to the justice of God.

Therefore, since the passion of Christ was sufficient and superabundant for the sin of the human race and the penalty incurred, his passion was a kind of ransom by which we were freed from both these obligations. This is very interesting, this line of theology that Aquinas goes on here. He talks about Jesus' atonement as being a kind of ransom.

And it's interesting that he phrases it very, very carefully. Believe me, these guys used words precisely, right? Words were their tools, and they knew exactly what they were writing. So he was very careful to write not a ransom, but a kind of ransom.

Because it's very difficult if you start thinking of Jesus' death, the price he paid as a ransom in totality, because who did he pay the ransom to? Well, in this analogy, the idea is that he had to pay the ransom to the devil. But the idea that God owes the devil anything is very hard to comprehend. And so here he's playing off different angles, trying to figure out, trying to explore the ramifications of, in this aspect, the work of Jesus on the cross in its totality.

Again, we just sort of have to pause and get a deep appreciation for what a great and prodigious work these men did who were these awesome theologians of this Christian empire period. And again, I've just introduced you to a few of them. Now, with the remainder of this briefer lecture among ours, we want to consider the life of a man who was not particularly a theologian, but a man who had a huge impact, and I think is a very notable man in this period of the medieval church or the Christian empire period, and that's Francis of Assisi.

Francis of Assisi lived about 800 years ago. He was born in the city of Assisi, Italy, the son of a man named Peter of Bernadone, who was a wealthy textile merchant. Now, Peter originally named his son John, but later nicknamed him Francis because he frequently sent his son to France on business trips.

So his original name was John, but they nicknamed him Francis. Now, what kind of young man was Francis? Well, listen, he was just a non-stop party guy. I mean, much in the mold of Augustine, if you want to say, drinking, womanizing, carousing.

He was a very popular playboy of the city of Assisi and was living a very carefree life. He received a basic education as much as you could in those medieval times, and he even learned a little Latin. Francis seemed destined to follow his father's footsteps as a prosperous merchant.

Now, by the way, before I mentioned institutions of education being destroyed or not existent, well, of course, that changed as the Middle Ages went on, and Francis of Assisi is an example of a man who received at least a rudimentary education, but probably, I can't say this with certainty because I don't know the fullness of his situation, but probably the rudimentary education that he received was at the hand of monks. They were probably regarded as the ones who taught him. Well, listen, when Francis was 20 years old, he was imprisoned for taking part in a feud with a nearby city.

You know, I don't know what it was. Maybe they were playing pranks on one another. Maybe they were committing small acts of violence, but he was imprisoned for a year, and when he got out of jail, Francis joined the army, but he couldn't complete his tour of duty because of illness.

This period of life would change his life forever, because during his period of illness, he was born again, and he gave his life to Jesus. Francis would spend hours meditating on the Lord in an old abandoned church, and he felt God drawing near to him there at that old abandoned church. His conversion wasn't one of those overnight things, but it was definitely real.

Some people come to Jesus, you know, through a very memorable one-time experience. Other people seem to come to Christ through a process. Francis was of that second type, but there were very many memorable experiences to come.

Francis was so on fire for the Lord that he started ministering to the people who needed it the most. He reached out to the lepers of his community, even though their disease made them repulsive to be around, and they were rejected by everybody else in the community. Francis said, you won't be rejected by me.

And when he was only 23 years old, Francis made a pilgrimage to Rome, after which he had a vision where God told him to rebuild the church where the Lord spoke to him so powerfully. So to raise money for the project, he sold his horse and some of his father's merchandise, and he gave the proceeds to a priest for the rebuilding project. Now when his father found out that some of his textiles had been given to charity, he was furious.

He actually took his son to court and filed a suit against his son for the loss of the merchandise, bringing Francis before the bishop, because that was the courts in that day. Again, I want to remind you that the institutions of society had vanished except for the church. So when you went to court, you went before the bishop.

When he brought Francis before the bishop, the father demanded full reimbursement for the goods that had been donated to rebuilding the church. So you know what Francis did? He said, okay father, I agree. I'll give you everything I have.

And so he took off the very clothes he was wearing at the time, and he walked away literally naked and said, I'll live my life from here on out. Francis was a radical guy. Nobody could question his commitment to

give away everything for the sake of the gospel.

Well, as you might guess, his father disowned him immediately, and Francis began begging to provide for the reconstruction of more churches. In his own simple way, Francis started doing just what he believed God wanted him to do. When he was 27 years old, he heard a sermon on Matthew chapter 10, verses 7 through 10, which reads this, and when you go preach saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons, freely you have received, freely give, provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs, for a worker is worthy of his hire.

When he heard the sermon on this text, Francis took personally the exhortation to live a life of apostolic poverty, and he began preaching on the subjects of brotherly love and repentance. Soon there were many people who wanted to imitate his example of a radical commitment to Jesus Christ. You know, Francis is a great example of this kind of guy who just gets radically right for the Lord himself, and other people are just drawn to him, right? It's sort of like he gets on fire, and other people just get around to watch him burn.

He and his followers would go out two by two, preaching the gospel. They would see some poor peasants working in their field, and he would run along and help them. They would just do good wherever they could.

Now their preaching wasn't fancy, but it spoke to the needs of people, and it did so directly. When Francis preached, he stressed that people should worship and adore God. He stressed that people should repent, that they should be generous, and that they should forgive the wrongs that were done to them by others.

He also emphasized loving one's neighbors and loving one's enemies. He emphasized the life of humility and living a life of Christian purity. And so as you might imagine, Francis and his followers soon became sore spots in the consciences of the community, and they had to pay a price for the way that they afflicted the conscience of their generation.

They were the constant objects of scorn and attack. Many people accused Francis of being insane because they gave everything away to live poor lives for God. He and his followers were often pelted with mud, they were insulted, and sometimes they even had the very humble clothes that they wore torn off their back.

But Francis always distinguished himself by bearing these persecutions with very good honor and good humor and gentleness. He's a great example of a man who let God plead his case. Now, Francis was also a man of deep emotion.

You can't really say that he was a great thinker or theologian, but he wanted to know Jesus intimately. It's said that one time somebody found Francis weeping and groaning very bitterly, thinking, man, this guy must be sick. This guy must have some kind of injury or disease.

What's wrong? So the man asked Francis, well, why are you weeping? And he said, I weep for the suffering of my Lord Jesus Christ, and when I think about it, I am ashamed that I don't go out weeping out loud throughout all the world. Well, after a while, Francis and 11 of his followers went to Rome to go see the Pope. They wanted the Pope's approval of their mission of poverty and preaching, and the Pope, Pope Innocent III, who I must say wasn't all that innocent, he gave his blessing upon their movement.

Later, in the year 1212, they sought the Pope's permission to organize as an officially recognized monastic movement. They were dedicated to a life of simplicity, and they called themselves the Friars Minor, or the Little Brothers. Now, if you remember what I said before about monasticism being useful because it absorbed reform movements within the church, this is a perfect example of it.

Here was this radical guy going around, you know, sort of condemning and convicting the church, not so much by his words, more by his lifestyle, because here the church was getting more and more wealthy, more and more opulent, more and more given over to politics. And here was a simple man who said, listen, I'm going to live a life of poverty and preaching for Jesus Christ. And that was convicting.

So what did they do? Give them a monastic order. Let's start that. You know, we can kind of close in his followers within this monastic order, where maybe they won't do that much damage, and where they can have the expression to do what they're doing within the church.

Anyway, that was the beginning of the Franciscan monks. And the followers of Francis were monks, but they were not the kind who went out to the desert, who shut themselves up in a monastery. They went out ministering to all sorts of people, preaching the gospel and helping the poor and needy.

You see, another one of Francis's passions was to bring peace and reconciliation between warring parties. And so in Assisi, he helped to heal civil strife between the townspeople and the rural nobility. You see, Francis wanted to combine a monk's devotion to God with Jesus's devotion to a needy world.

More than anything, Francis wanted to renounce the world without leaving it. And so the Franciscans pursued these great objectives. They preached the gospel, they'd care for the sick and the poor.

Now, there's something else that you should know about Francis. He had a passion to preach the gospel to the lost. Francis started evangelical missions to Syria and to Morocco.

He was unable to complete them because of illness or because of adverse circumstances. But in 1219, he himself traveled to Egypt to convert the Sultan Kamil. But the Muslim leader never responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Francis also tried to go to the Holy Land, but was thwarted by shipwreck. The evangelistic zeal of the Franciscans would continue after Francis's death. And some of Francis's later followers went as far as China, preaching the gospel, sometimes with amazing results.

The evangelistic zeal of Francis is displayed in a particular story about his travels. They say that Francis was staying at a monastery while on a journey, and three notorious robbers came to the gate begging for bread. The gatekeeper rebuked the thieves and sent them away.

But when Francis heard about it, he wasn't pleased at all. He told the gatekeeper, you go take some food and find those needy men, because people are won to the kingdom of God by kindness, not by the rebukes of man. So the gatekeeper set out to find the robbers, and Francis started praying.

When the robbers were found and fed, they were so convicted that they committed their lives to Jesus Christ. That sort of thing was very typical of Francis's life. His gentle concern for the basic needs of people won many people to the kingdom.

Francis was also famous for the love of all creation. Many times when you see an artistic representation of Francis, he's got birds all around him, right? Because in a story that's cherished by his followers, Francis preached a sermon to a flock of birds, exhorting them to praise and love their creator. Once they said that when Francis was preaching to a group of swallows, they made so much noise that he couldn't hear his own voice.

He told them to quiet down, and they quieted down until the sermon was finished. Of course, that's probably just a legend. But it was said that Francis's love of nature endured to the very end of his life, even though he ended his life with a lot of pain.

I have to say that the last years of Francis's life were actually pretty sad, but very instructive about the nature of the medieval church. You see, Francis asked Pope Honorarius to appoint a particular cardinal as the protector of the Franciscan order. And when that happened, changes were made in the rule of the Franciscan monks that changed the whole way that they ran things, and those changes turned out to be for the worse.

You see, in the same year that the new rule of order was approved for the Franciscan monks, Francis resigned from his own monastic order. It no longer had the simple devotion to Jesus that he cared so passionately about. And so instead of being despised, the Franciscans began to enjoy wide respect and admiration.

Success with the world proved to be more damaging to the Franciscan movement than all the years of rejection and hatred. So isn't that interesting? Francis resigned from his own monastic order because it had parted so much from the ideals that he worked so hard to breed in them. So Francis spent the last days of his life in solitude and in prayer, and he also did a little bit of writing.

In the last year of his life, Francis took a look at the organization that he had started and resigned from, the Franciscan Brethren, and in a written work titled Testament, Francis complained that in a few years, since he began with just 11 devoted followers, the movement had already become legalistic and binding, losing the glorious freedom found in the very simple life that he lived, with few possessions and imitating Jesus Christ. He died in 1226. He was only 44 years old when he died.

Now something very interesting happened when Francis died. His body was examined for burial, and people noticed curious red scars on his hands, on his feet, and on his side. These are traditionally referred to as stigmata, mystical replicas of Christ's wounds.

The marks were never confirmed during his lifetime. They were only seen at his death, but there was nothing to indicate that those marks were indeed miraculous in origin. It could very well have been just a strange coincidence, or it could have been self-inflicted wounds that Francis made in perhaps a misguided attempt at devotion to his Lord.

Perhaps the very best way to end the brief look at the life of Francis of Assisi is to think about a famous prayer that he's written. You've probably seen this prayer before. It's worth taking a look at.

He says, Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, not so much to be understood as to understand, not so much to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. It is in dying that we awaken to eternal life. You've got to admit, that's a prayer with a whole lot of the nature of Jesus in it, isn't it? Isn't that an outstanding perspective on how to live the Christian life? And you think of so many people that you know who sort of go around perpetually hurt, perpetually wounded, perpetually sore about things.

Man, if they would take this very godly prayer, so filled with the of Jesus from the pen of Francis of Assisi, they would be much the better for it. And so I think Francis of Assisi stands before us as really an outstanding, shining light of this medieval period. Overall, as I've said before, most people tend to be too critical of the medieval period.

Listen, they weren't cavemen, right? It wasn't like they went back in culture and in politics and all those things that far as if they lived, you know, as wild animals. And even though there was a tremendous amount of corruption in the church, it wasn't all corrupt. There were certainly some shining lights among a lot of corruption in the church at that time.

And one of those shining lights was Francis of Assisi.

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