

# "GOSPELS, WALK THRU THE NEW TESTAMENT."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Luke 1:1-4; I John 1:1-3

## Introduction.

Tonight we have one more introduction to the NT, more specifically to the four Gospel that begin the NT. They deserve and merit their own introduction. Our challenge is to push past our familiarity and complacency to encounter in a fresh way our Savior who became flesh and dwelt among us.

We must start with the obvious, but interesting observation that Jesus never wrote anything that He left on earth. There are no books by Jesus, just books about Jesus.

John concludes his own Gospel emphasizing the vastness of Jesus' ministry beyond the written word.

**John 21:25** Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

The Gospels are utterly unique in all of literature. Before the Gospels were written nothing like this had ever been seen or heard before.

The word for Gospel is euangelion which means good news, there had never been proclaimed before good news like this. The good news of God in Jesus Christ is news besides which there is no other, and none better. The four writers are called evangelists, meaning bringer of good news.

The writers of the Gospels did not set out to write a biography or a history of the life and times of Jesus Christ. We must guard against reading them as mere facts or bare history, they are redemptive history, salvation history, the very means of faith. They are the four pillars on which the

history of our redemption is laid. Without this foundation our redemption crumbles.

They are not biographies. They include nothing of Jesus' home life, how He spent His youth, nothing of His personality traits, physical appearance, nothing of His inner thoughts or feelings.

They are not histories. More important than historical details were the spiritual realities, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Savior and Lord of the Church and that in Him the glory of God has appeared and is revealed to all mankind.

Nor are the Gospels strictly chronological, they are more concerned with the significance of what happened than with the date of what happened. Nor do they make any claim at being the complete story.

These are the memoirs of men who had witnessed firsthand and experienced personally the most remarkable and dramatic transformation as a result of life, teachings, miracles, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**1 John 1:1** ... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands.

These were men known to have been with Jesus from the beginning. Matthew was one of the first to be called by Jesus as a disciple. John was one of the inner circle of three, called the beloved disciple, especially close to Jesus. Mark gives us Peter's eyewitness accounts.

### **Background to the Gospels.**

*First*, all the writers were godly Christian men who were committed to integrity and truthfulness, men for whom the truth mattered supremely. They gave their lives for this truth.

*Second*, their impartiality is evident by how they included less than favorable stories that highlighted the apostles own flaws and sins. Peter's denial and impetuosity. They didn't clean up the record or sugarcoat it or scrub the rough edges.

*Third*, they themselves were all eyewitnesses or reported the testimonies of eyewitnesses. They were all close to the sources and events.

*Fourth*, before Jesus left, He promised to send His Holy Spirit who would enable the apostles to remember correctly everything Jesus said and did. Because of the Holy Spirit we have preserved for us the truth of the testimony concerning Jesus with certainty and trustworthiness.

**John 14:25-26** These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

*Fifth*, God supernaturally protected and preserved His Word that it would be passed down from generation to generation for all people in all times and in all places.

### **Why four Gospels?**

People who try to say the multiple perspectives and records cast doubt on them all are wrong. God gave us the gospels this way for a reason. Nothing with God is accidental or without purpose.

*First*, there is a principle in Scripture of the necessity of truth being confirmed by multiple witnesses.

**Deuteronomy 19:15** Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

We have four witnesses who didn't collude to tell exactly the same story, but to tell what they had seen and heard from their vantage point. Multiple witnesses strengthen historical credibility and undercut claims of fabrication.

*Second*, God is not a minimalist, but delights to reveal the fullness of Christ. He doesn't give us a flat photograph, but a full 3-D portrait of Jesus in all of His glory and in all His offices. We are not given redundancy, but richness.

The four Gospels reflect the theological richness of the Trinity, one God, three persons; Jesus, one person two natures; the Scriptures, one book, divine and human with many authors. Four Gospels, one Christ. We are given unity and diversity, and we are richer for it.

The Gospels don't contradict one another, rather they give us four complementary accounts of what Jesus said and did during His life on earth. The four gospels emphasize different parts of the gospel but communicate the same message.

Is it like a beautiful symphony with different instruments playing their notes but in harmony with the whole.

**Third**, each writer had their own audience and purpose. They wrote to four different communities, each with their own needs. The four Gospels reach and include the whole universal church.

Matthew wrote to Jews. He includes OT quotes and fulfilled prophecies. Mark wrote to Romans. They don't know the OT Scriptures, Mark fills in. Luke wrote to Greeks. For the student, cultured, filled with songs. John wrote to all who will believe. Gives the extraordinary claims of Jesus, His divine character and mission.

**Fourth**, each one paints a different portrait. Christ's person and work are too vast for a single perspective. No single Gospel could fully capture it all.

Matthew's Portrait of Jesus: The Son of David, The Promised King

Matthew: Jesus is the promised Christ of the OT Scriptures.

Mark's Portrait of Jesus: The Son of Man, The Servant King

Mark: Jesus is the Suffering Servant who calls us to suffer.

Luke's Portrait of Jesus: The Son of Adam, The Savior King

Luke: Jesus is the universal Savior of the World.

John's Portrait of Jesus: The Son of God, The Divine King

John: Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who gives eternal life.

Together they give us a complete portrait.

***Fifth***, each Gospel presses a different response.

Matthew: Promised King who commands obedience

Mark: Suffering Servant who calls us to take up the cross

Luke: Universal Savior who seeks the lost

John: Incarnate Son of God who demands faith

***Sixth***, each one begins in a different place with a different perspective and a specific emphasis.

Mark is the shortest and earliest of the Gospels. He plunges straight into the public ministry of Jesus with John the Baptist proclamation.

John goes to the other extreme and reaches back into eternity past, the pre-incarnate existence of Jesus, “In the beginning was the Word.” Long before He was flesh, He was God.

Matthew and Luke tell us the actual story of Jesus’ birth, Matthew from the point of view of Joseph, Luke from the perspective of Mary.

The fourfold Gospel says we can never fully exhaust the knowledge of Christ, but only grow deeper in it. And that is cause for greater worship and praise.

### ***The Synoptic Gospels***

There is one more aspect of the Gospels that has to be understood in an introduction to them. Any reader of the four Gospels will notice that there is something similar in Matthew, Mark and Luke and something different in John. The first three share a lot of the same information, while John is distinct. There is a very clear and obvious difference between the first three and the fourth.

The first three focus on Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, John focuses on Judea. The three portray Jesus as a man of action and narrate His miracles, parables, and addresses to the multitudes. John is more thoughtful and reflective, meditative.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means seen together, meaning similar, as in sharing a similar point of view, and sharing similar resources.

Scholars of the Gospels believe Mark was the earliest Gospel and that Matthew and Luke had access to Mark's Gospel and included some of Mark in their own Gospel. They also believe there was another document that Matthew and Luke shared because of some of the similarities between their two Gospels that are not in Mark.

Contrary to liberal opinion, the Synoptic Gospels don't contradict each other in what they say happened, they complement each other. They're like different portraits of the same person. They have drawn the same person, but the three who drew the portraits drew them differently.

So when Matthew records Jesus as saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and Luke records Jesus as saying "Blessed are the poor" the question is not which one is right.

At the same time or at different times Jesus said and did some similar things, and different people saw or heard from a different perspective or wrote with a different intention.

### **Implications and application.**

Familiarity with the Gospels can create a challenge for us. Have you grown used to Jesus without being changed by Him? The danger is not that we do not know the Gospel, but that we think we know it well enough.

The Gospel writers are not just biographers, not just historians, not just relating bare facts, not even just eyewitness story tellers, they are theologians, truth tellers who are going after the jugular, going after our hearts and souls and minds.

The question is whether we will repent, believe, and follow the Christ they proclaim.

**John 9:25** One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.

The Gospels declare we live in an open universe. Heaven has come down and invaded earth, we live in the visited planet. The Gospels present Jesus in our midst, alive and in person.

This is the record of the testimony of the most unique person in the history of the universe, a man named Jesus who came to a specific time and place, was conceived in a virgin's womb by the power of God's Spirit, was endowed with amazing powers to heal the sick, cast out demons, give sight to the blind and even raise the dead. Who was prophesied and predicted hundreds, even thousands of years before, and who came to fulfill everything that was spoken about Him.

Jesus Christ is the greatest gift ever given to all of humanity by God. To not believe is to bring down a terrible judgment. To believe is to receive the greatest gift and inheritance, eternal life.

The Gospels take us on the greatest adventure in human history and in our life. The Gospels tell us of events in the past, but they call for a response of faith and obedience. They are written as expressions of faith, meant to foster and build our faith.

Through the Gospels may we all have a greater desire to know this Jesus who abides in us and with whom we will spend eternity.

**I John 1:4** We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Let's spend time in the NT together for the sake of our joy.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but these words will abide forever, they will never pass away.

**John 20:30-31** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but *these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*