

# Gospel & Messiah

*Four distinct portraits, one historical Jesus*

## **JESUS: THE PARCHMENTS**

### **Focus and frustration**

Jesus stands central. For the Christian, the Jesus who was born, lived, died, rose again and ascended is the foundation of everything. The purpose of the Gospels is to proclaim this truth.

It is the magnetic attraction of their subject, and their apparent simplicity, with story and saying, that draws people to read the Gospels. Nevertheless, having begun to explore the text many readers soon become frustrated: -

- One story in four quite distinct versions;
- Similar material used in contrasting ways;
- Identical sayings expressed in different forms;
- Unique material freely woven into shared traditions;
- Minimal chronological and historical framework;
- Greatest emphasis given to the week of the crucifixion;
- Some statements seem hard to understand;
- Some of the demands appear quite shocking.

For this reason many Christians prefer the epistles to the Gospels; but the gospels are the foundation to the epistles. What is needed is a clearer understanding of what the Gospels are.

### **Truth with force**

The Gospels comprise four separate documents with a single focus, quite distinct yet clearly harmonising. It is not the purpose of the Gospels to present a detailed historical account of the life of Jesus. The Gospels are not:

- Biographies, in the modern sense of the term (i.e. a detailed account of an individual's life). Nevertheless, the scholarly consensus is that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) should be regarded as Graeco-Roman biographies in form.
- Hagiographies : glorified story of an individual.

The Gospels are rather vibrant proclamations that Jesus is Messiah. They are like four portraits painted from the same palette but using the colour, brush strokes and perspective in individual ways.



The word, 'gospel' comes from the Anglo Saxon 'God-spel' meaning 'God's story'; and that it certainly is. The authors tell us the facts but their work is shaped by the particular truths it is their burden to communicate. This is not analytical or theoretical truth, but truth filled with the fire of faith that inspired those who experienced it to turn the world upside down. Justin Martyr, who appears to have been the first person to call the writings 'gospels', speaks of them as 'memories of the apostles'; reflections with a razor edge.

## **Gospels as ancient biography**

Graeco-Roman biographies typically had the following features:

- They consisted of prose or episodic narrative of between 10,000 and 20,000 words in length.
- They had a bare chronological outline beginning with birth or arrival on the public scene and ending with death.
- They selected stories, anecdotes, speeches and sayings which could be arranged:
  - chronologically or
  - topically.

Ancient biographies were about a person, by an author and for a purpose. The Gospels were written:

- To persuade people that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (John 20:31);
- To inform and encourage discipleship.

## **Four yet one**

The closer you examine the Gospels the more apparent their genius becomes. From the earliest days they have always shared equality, standing together in literary value and spiritual authority, none taking precedence over the other. The reason lies in their spiritual power, unique inter-relationship and individual character.

Why exactly there are four Gospels we cannot say. They resulted from the fact that different communities needed a book about Jesus, and one written for the needs of one group did not meet the particular needs of others. Each Gospel stands with equal authority because each has an interest in Jesus at two levels:

- Interest in who he was, what he did and what happened;
- Retelling the story to meet the needs of particular groups.

The four Gospels together give us one multidimensional focus on Jesus; each of them:



- Record facts about Jesus;
- Recall teaching of Jesus;
- Render witness to Jesus.

### **Finding the threads**

Many of the difficulties in interpreting the Gospels come from the fact that there are four of them, and also from the fact that Jesus did not write a gospel himself. Had Jesus written a Gospel himself it most certainly would have been like one of the books of the prophets; similar to Amos or Joel containing mainly oracles with possibly fragments of narrative. Instead what we have are writings *about* Jesus.

We are in fact very much in the dark about the origin and development of the Gospels. The fact that Jesus' natural tongue was Aramaic, and what we have are Greek translations, points to the earliest phase of the birth of the Gospels. A period during which the teaching of Jesus and the memory of his works was preached and passed on in oral form amongst the early Christian communities (cf. Acts 2:42). Because a growing number would not speak the Aramaic of Jesus the *koine* Greek of the Mediterranean world was used instead.

### **Weaving the strands**

The way the Gospel writers use their material suggests there was a whole body of Jesus' sayings, loosely related to each other, but with little idea of their chronological relationship or reference to the circumstances in which they were originally spoken. This was probably because Jesus used similar material on different occasions. Other sayings were clearly set into the context of the event in which they were spoken; a story leading to the saying as its climax; called 'pronouncement stories'. There were also stories of miracles and other important events that made up this body of oral tradition.

At what stage the oral sayings and stories (called 'pericopes'), began to be put into writing we simply cannot say. Initially the spoken and written would have run alongside one another. Luke (1:1-2) refers to 'many people' attempting to write about Jesus, but we have no certain idea about this early work. Debate about the order, the date of writing and the interrelationship of the present Gospels to each other continues.

### **Shaping the fabric**

The four Gospels stand together, and in time they became known collectively as 'the Gospel'. While the four each share difference and similarity with each other, John immediately stands out as significantly distinct from the other three. Much has been made of this through the centuries, following Clement of Alexandria who called John the 'spiritual gospel'; but all the Gospels are spiritual. Furthermore, the Jewishness of John and the vital importance of his historical references have been increasingly recognised. While it is true that in John, Jesus is constantly speaking about himself



and his mission in a way that is rare in the others, the differences are now understood to be particular rather than basic.

The other three Gospels are much more closely interwoven. This has led them to be called 'the synoptics' (lit. 'through one eye'), having a common or shared view. They share the same general structure in their approach to writing; each has a similar overall framework and sequence of events to the ministry of Jesus; e.g. baptism, temptation, Galilee, Caesarea Philippi, journey to Jerusalem, the last week. They share a high degree of similarity in their content and they share real literary dependence that is seen in common vocabulary and style, even in similar word order at times; this is all the more surprising when you recognise that each Gospel was a Greek transcript of original oral Aramaic accounts. Various theories try to account for these phenomena.

### **The Synoptic Problem**

- The same passages often appear in all 3 gospels – the triple tradition
- In the triple tradition all 3 often agree in the placement of material. When there is disagreement Mk is supported by either Mt or Lk
- About 90% of Mk is found in Mt and about 50% in Lk
- In the triple tradition verbatim agreement varies but is, on average, around 50%
- In the triple tradition, besides verbatim agreement, there are substantial agreements between Mt & Mk v Lk and between Mk & Lk v Mt but relatively few between Mt & Lk v Mk
- As a whole, agreement between Mt & Lk begins where Mk begins and ends where Mk ends. Mt & Lk both have birth narratives but these do not agree. Similarly, their resurrection accounts do not agree
- The above is true also of individual pericopes. Mk is thus closer to both Mt & Lk than they are to each other
- Mt & Lk share approx 200 verses which are not in Mk. This is almost completely sayings material. Verbatim agreement varies from 100% to very little – the double tradition
- The material in the double tradition is not arranged in the same way in the two gospels
- Both Mt & Lk have a large number of verses which are unique to their gospel

### **Synoptic Solutions**

- Two Source Hypothesis (Q)
  - Mk was written first, Mt & Lk used Mk independently and also used a sayings source "Q" independently as well as their own material
- Griesbach Hypothesis



- Mt was first, Lk used Mt and his own material, Mk was last and conflated Mt & Lk, copying both where there was agreement . If they disagreed, he would copy one or the other, or omit both
- Mark without Q
  - Mk was first
  - Mt used Mk & his own material
  - Lk used Mt & Mk & his own material

### **John and the Synoptics**

- John dependent on Synoptics
- John completely independent of Synoptics
- John knew Mark, but not necessarily Matthew and Luke, but did not use Mark as a source

Although there is almost certainly no literary dependence between John and the Synoptics, Richard Bauckham has recently persuasively argued that John “rarely repeats and largely complements Mark’s narrative, and in such a way that chronological dovetailing of the two narratives can easily be accomplished”.<sup>1</sup> Bauckham suggests that two of the “Johannine asides” in John 3:24; 11:2 are intended specifically for readers who also knew Mark. In 3:24 we are told that “John (the Baptist) had not yet been thrown in prison”. Yet John nowhere narrates the imprisonment of John the Baptist. He assumes his readers know this from elsewhere. In addition, this verse is redundant in its immediate context as it is obvious that John could not be in prison if he was baptising! Thus, Bauckham argues, the verse is explicitly there to provide a clue as to where the Johannine narrative fits into Mark’s narrative. For those who knew Mark, Jesus’ Galilean public ministry began “after John was arrested” (Mk 1:14). Similarly, in 11:2 Mary is introduced “as the one who anointed the Lord with perfume ...” yet John does not actually narrate this incident until chapter 12! Once again readers of John are expected to know the story from Mark 14:3-9.

Bauckham demonstrates that John and Mark dovetail in the following way:

John 1:1-18	Prologue - pre-existence of the Word
Mk 1:1-13	Appearance of John the Baptist and baptism of Jesus (presupposed in John 1:32-34)

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Bauckham, “John for Readers of Mark” in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 147-71 (159).

John 1:19 - 4:42	First miracle at Cana in Galilee (but not in public context) followed by Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem
John 4:43-45 = Mk 1:14-15	Public ministry in Galilee
John 4:46-54	Second sign (Cana reached before Sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16) on the way from Samaria)
Mk 1:16 - 6:6	
Mk 6:7-13 }	Twelve sent out
John 5 }	whilst Jesus goes to Jerusalem; in John 5:33-35 Jesus refers to John the Baptist in the past tense
Mk 6:14-29	Death of John the Baptist
John 6:1-21 = Mk 6:30-52	Feeding of 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water. Note Mk 6:50 = John 6:20 = "it is I" = "I am" = "egō eimi". In John we have seven absolute "I am" sayings (4:26; 6:20; 8:24; 8:28; 13:19; 18:5; 18:6; 18:8). John thus provides a fuller and more developed Christology for readers who already know Mark and so also informs their understanding of the "I am" saying in Mk 14:62. John, of course, supplements this with other "I am" sayings ("bread of life", "light of the world", "before Abraham was", "the gate for the sheep", "the good shepherd", "the resurrection and the life", "the way, the truth and the life", "the true vine").
John 6:22-71	Bread/flesh and blood discourse
John 7:1	Summarises Mk 6:53 - 9:50 in one verse! We know John is speaking of approximately a six-month period of Jesus' ministry in this verse from the chronology given. Feeding of 5,000 takes place "near Passover" (John 6:4) but in John 7:2 the Feast of Tabernacles is near.
John 7:2-9	After this Jesus is never again in Galilee in John prior to the resurrection
John 7:10 - 10:39	Fills out Mk 10:1a



John 10:40-42	Jesus is “beyond the Jordan” as in Mk 10:1b; this summarises Mk 10:1-31
John 11	Raising of Lazarus. Jesus retreats to “Ephraim in the region near the wilderness” with disciples
Mk 10:32-52	On the road to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus at Jericho
John 12:1-11	Anointing of Jesus by Mary at Bethany
John 12:12-19 = Mk 11:1-11	Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem
John 12:20-50	Jesus now hides (12:36b) and concentrates on disciples
John 13 - 17	Fills out Mk 14:10-31
John 18:1-11 = Mk 14:32-52	Jesus in Gethsemane, betrayal and arrest
John 18:12-23	Jesus before Annas
Mk 14:53-65	Jesus before Caiaphas summarised in John 18:24
John 18:25-27 = Mk 14:66-72	Peter’s denial
John 18:28 - 19:42	Parallels and fills out Mk 15 - Jesus’ trial before Pilate, crucifixion, death and burial
John 20:1-18 = Mk 16:1-8	Resurrection and appearance to Mary Magdalene
John 20:19 - 21:25	

There is a significant gap in the above narrative sequence, namely Mk 11:12 - 14:9. This brings out the prime difference between the chronology of John and the structure of the Synoptics. The latter have Jesus active in Galilee for about one year followed by a single fateful trip to Jerusalem during which the cleansing of the temple takes place. John has a series of visits by Jesus to Jerusalem in the course of a ministry which lasts two to three years and places the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of the gospel on Jesus’ first visit to Jerusalem.

In two significant places, when compared with Mk 11:12 - 14:9, John has a different chronology (cleansing of the temple and the anointing of Jesus prior to his entry into Jerusalem whereas Mark places this event after the triumphal entry). In both places John gives explicit chronological information - John 2:20 (temple under construction for 46 years); John 12:1 (6 days before the Passover). For readers who knew Mark



it is as though John specifically indicates that his chronology is the correct one and that Mark, as far as the Jerusalem events are concerned, has arranged his narrative to climax in Jerusalem and has thus not followed a strict chronological sequence.

## **JESUS: THE PERSON**

### **Faith and history**

Down through the centuries the church has tended to proclaim the words and deeds of Jesus in terms of his divinity rather than his humanity. Discussion about Jesus the historical figure has too often been confined to the area of apologetics. Some Christians have even felt that to base their faith on too much history might corrupt it; 'all preaching needs is the fact that he died on the cross'. Here we have the tragic but classic divide between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith'.

We have seen that it is not the purpose of the Gospels to present a detailed history of Jesus' life. The writers only present those historical details that are essential to proclaiming the truth of Jesus' significance. Yet it is clear that the truth they proclaim only has validity because it is grounded in history (cf. 1Jn 1:1-2). The two cannot be separated without ending in a sterility that destroys both. Only held together can truth and history bring the revelation of living faith that it is the purpose of the Gospels to declare.

### **Jesus of history**

By the 19th century many believed that the Gospels were so much the product of the early church that they obscured the Jesus of history, so a quest began to reach into and behind the text in an attempt to find him. But such an approach is very subjective, who is to decide which are authentic references to Jesus and which are not? The pictures of Jesus which emerged were said to be like 'looking down a deep well and seeing your own reflection at the bottom'; a Jesus created to fit the writer's own required image. One thing that is certain is that the Jesus of history will disturb and challenge every age as he did his own.

We know that the material in the Gospels has been edited and presented to fulfil a specific purpose, but we know they are also historically dependable records. Many questions remain, but their text provides keys to discovering Jesus within his historical context. This is not something that is simply desirable; it is absolutely vital if we are to properly understand his mission and message.

### **Jesus the Jew**

In the late 1920's Albert Schweitzer wrote that the quest for the historical Jesus believed 'it could bring him straight back to our own time as teacher and saviour ... but he does not stay; he passes by our own time and returns to his own ... it could not keep him in our own time, but had to let him go'. But this is only what we should expect to be the result of our study of the Gospels. The truth is that it is only when



we discover Jesus in his own time that we can properly discover how he is also the person for all times.

Jesus was a Palestinian Jew, not a child of the twentieth century western middle class. The politics, beliefs and society of his day were his environment, setting the scene and conditioning his words and actions. So much of what he said and did is missed or meaningless if we do not start with Jesus the Jew. His significance is eternal but it is revealed through the temporal and cultural.

In order for Jesus to communicate with the people of his day he had to move within the constraints of his culture. His words and actions, his behaviour, life-style and his death were all part of the truth he came to communicate and had to be expressed in a way that the ordinary person of his day could understand. Yet within those constraints we often see him creatively bending them to take people's understanding beyond the expected:

- The constraint of Torah interpretation meant he had to override some of its provisions;
- The constraint of time was challenged by the declaration of God's kingdom now, and the acts of miracle;
- The constraint of belief about God and messiah was enlarged by bringing the two together in his humanity;
- The constraint of Roman law led to his execution as a revolutionary; which he was not.

Without understanding the Jewishness of Jesus and the constraints within which he moved we will never understand the Gospels and the significance of their message.

## Time and place

It is quite impossible to give a clear chronological outline to the life of Jesus. The Gospels have significant variations in the order in which they relate the same events. However, working from the historical references that are in the text we can fix certain points and present a broad outline.

□ **Birth:** Estimated to be about 6 BCE before, but not long before, the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE. Luke's reference (2:1-2) that it was at the Roman census under Quirinius does not settle the issue as there is no record of a census during Herod's rule, and Quirinius is not known to have been governor of Syria until 6 CE when his census provoked the revolt of Judas the Galilean.

□ **Baptism:** John the Baptist probably started preaching about 28 CE; Luke's careful dating (3:1) still leaves doubt because the reign of Tiberius may not be being calculated from 14 CE, but two years before when he was co-regent with his father. Jesus was 'about 30 years old' when John baptised him (Lk 3:23), but how long after John began his ministry Jesus came to be baptised by him we cannot say. How long Jesus and John continued their parallel ministry before John was arrested



is also uncertain; but Jesus probably began his public ministry in Galilee around 29-30 CE.

□ **Ministry:** The 'synoptics' speak of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee, with simply a final visit to Jerusalem that leads to his death. John's Gospel speaks about early ministry in Judaea before moving north to Galilee (probably after news of John the Baptist's imprisonment), and then frequent visits to Jerusalem before the final journey that would conclude in crucifixion. So much more of Jesus' public ministry took place in Judaea than the 'synoptics' suggest. Several of these visits were in connection with festivals (Jn 5:1; 7:1-14; 10:22), which would fit naturally as interludes into his activity in Galilee.

Jesus also made three short journeys outside Galilee:

- North into Phoenicia and back via Decapolis east of Galilee (Mk 7:24,31);
- North to Caesarea Philippi on the lower slopes of Mount Hermon (Mk 8:27);
- East across Jordan to the area of John the Baptist's earlier activity (Jn 10:40).

Jesus moved within a very small geographical area during the period of his public ministry, an area of no more than 125 miles by 50 miles, a territory no larger than Devon and Cornwall, and most of it in a small part of that area.

□ **Crises:** The Gospels seem to make it clear that there were certain turning-points in Jesus' ministry:

- The arrest of John the Baptist leading to the beginning of his Galilean ministry (cf. Mk 1:14);
- The attempt by the Galilean crowd to make him king and the death of John leading to a period of withdrawal (cf. Jn 6:15; Mt 14:1-12);
- The retreat in Caesarea Philippi with Peter's confession and teaching about his death leading to the final journey towards Jerusalem (cf. Lk 9:18-20,51).

□ **Duration:** The 'synoptics' compress the picture of Jesus' public ministry into a very brief period, but as we have seen it is the historical references in John that provide the most helpful basis for reconstruction, especially his references to feasts. Mark seems to refer to two springtimes (2:23; 6:39) besides the Passover when Jesus died. John refers to three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 12:1); though the first depends on the dating of the Temple incident that the 'synoptics' link with the final Passover. All the chronological details can be disputed but majority opinion believes that Jesus' public ministry lasted two and a half to three years.

□ **Climax:** If Passover in the year Jesus died fell on a Friday the astronomical data suggests either 30 or 33 CE (but not 31 or 32 CE). 33 CE seems most likely unless we put the ministry of John the Baptist earlier.



## JUDAEA AND POLITICS

Judaea and Samaria, centred on the capital Jerusalem, was ruled by Archelaus at the death of his father Herod the Great in 4 BCE. But his rule was a disaster and ten years later the Romans imposed direct rule incorporating Judaea into the province of Syria under its own local Roman governor; from 26-36 CE this was Pontius Pilate. Despite Pilate's inept style the Romans did try to be tolerant of the Jews, but of course they were hated as occupiers. Over and above their religious taxes, the Jews also had to pay Roman dues, including a poll tax. The total taxation a Jew had to face was in excess of 40% of income. This was hated, as were the Jewish tax collectors who were seen as collaborating and also cheating their own people.

Jerusalem was the seat of the Sanhedrin that, under Rome's watchful eye, was chaired by the High Priest. It was the supreme religious council, parliament and to the Jew the true government. Its dominant party were the Sadducees, an aristocratic minority whose concerns were to maintain Temple worship and political influence; probably reasonably satisfied with the status quo. The Roman census of 6 CE led to a revolt by Judas the Galilean, it came to nothing but fuelled the hopes of different activist groups believing that insurrection was the only answer. They were only properly known as 'Zealots' in the catastrophic Jewish War of 66-70 CE. Among the supporters of Judas the Galilean were Pharisees whose prime loyalty was to the Torah and the intricate traditions that had grown up around it. Many of the Pharisees were scribes whose job was to know, copy and interpret the Torah. This zeal for the Torah made the Pharisees potential allies of zealot groups. Pharisees remained in the mainstream of life but others like the Essenes became ascetic and separatist living in the deserts pursuing holiness and waiting for God to initiate a final war with the forces of darkness.

### Galilee and society

Galilee was governed by the half-Jewish Herod Antipas, who fared better with the Romans than his half-brother Archelaus had done. Its main inhabitants were peasants settled in villages and occupied with farming. The main cities were Tiberias and Sepphoris, they were Hellenised but had little influence on life in the rural area; there was clearly some urban/rural tension. Galilee generally fared better than Judaea; Antipas cushioning worst effects of Roman rule. There was a growing number of poor landless rural working class (day labourers' and 'hired servants') who were becoming more conscious of their lot. There was injustice throughout the province, economic pressure (urban and rural); due to increasing taxation, ambitious rulers, foreign exploitation.

Galilee appears to have been less susceptible to revolutionary fervour than Judaea; their simple need to stay alive and the population scattered among hamlets made them suspicious of revolutionary movements inspired by the religious and urban conditions of Jerusalem (Judas the Galilean got his support from Judaea not Galilee). They had conservative religious attitudes centred around respect and annual pilgrimage to the Temple. Pharisaic and scribal influence was marginal. We



know of Galilean holy men; 'hasidim' like Hanina ben Dos and Honi the Circle-drawer. They appear to have lived on the fringes of society with an alternative lifestyle who probably had considerable support among the common people.

### **Conflict and holiness**

Jesus stands within this tension-filled world of first century Palestine with its economic pressure, political anger and frustrated hopes. Much of the time Jesus was in Galilee he appears to have been a rural wanderer like other Hasidic teachers and holy men, avoiding the Herodian centres of Tiberius and Sepphoris. But whenever Jesus touched established forms of Judaism, especially in more urban areas, opposition to him showed itself forcibly.

To the people of his day the teaching of Jesus would have been viewed as thoroughly 'political'. He would have been seen, not as an anti-Roman revolutionary, but as a traitor to the Jewish nationalist cause. This was not only a time of conflict between Roman and Jew, rich and poor, as we have seen. It was also a time of conflict between different groups within Judaism as to what being a loyal Jew amid the crisis really involved.

In their Gentile polluted land the Jew saw the Temple and the Torah as central. They looked for the restoration of the nation of Israel and the Temple. For this to happen it required holiness; obedience to God's essential demand. This holiness had to be worked out in social and political terms. There were different ideas as to what this meant; this led to the development of divergent political groups each offering different practical solutions. All this climaxed in the conflict with Rome between 66-70 CE.

### **Impact and reaction**

Jesus was political because he offered an alternative to the power structures of Judaism. He was political because his proclamation about the inbreaking of the kingdom of God challenged Israel's political ambitions. His words and actions confronted the different Jewish expectations about holiness and restoration head on and evoked a stinging reaction. Jesus did not die for an idea, he died because of what he did and said.

Holiness in the thinking of first century Palestinian Judaism was built an interpretation of 'be holy, for I am holy' (Lev 19:2), which was exclusive and nationalistic. In contrast Jesus preached an inclusive message based on his declaration, 'be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful' (Lk 6:36). He was inaugurating a new way of being the people of God:

- Roman oppression was to be met by turning the other cheek and going the second mile (Mt 5:41);
- Israel was to be the light of the world (Mt 5:14);



- Loving acceptance of outsiders and sinners, even if they don't repent in the way some people think they ought to (Mt 11:19);
- The breaking in of the new age makes the obligations of present Judaism insignificant; dead bury their dead, food laws, Sabbath, hand washing etc.

Restoration of the nation was central to Jewish eschatology at that time (cf. Acts 1:6). Jesus' words and actions proclaim this restoration is already taking place in an unexpected way:

- Choosing the Twelve; the nucleus of the restored community;
- Table fellowship with sinners anticipates the messianic banquet;
- Miracles were signs of the restoration; blind, lame, leper etc were not just healed but restored to the community;
- His mission fulfils the scriptures;
- Through his death and resurrection there will be a reborn new covenant community of people whose sins are forgiven.

The Temple was central to national identity and the ideology of resistance. Jesus' warnings about impending judgment on the Temple were attacks on this idolatry of nationalism; 'you have made it a den of insurrectionists' (Mt 21:13); "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). Jesus' display of authority in cleansing the Temple and declaration to destroy and rebuild it was a Messianic claim based on 2 Sam 7 which was interpreted in Jesus' day that the Messiah had the right over the Temple and would build the eschatological Temple.

Attacking the Temple marked Jesus for death by the leaders of priesthood, with their access to Pilate.

## **JESUS: THE PRESENTATION**

### **Gospel and kingdom**

The abiding contribution of the original quest for the historical Jesus was that eschatology was central to his life and mission and that it makes no sense without this understanding. The fabric of the Gospels is dominated by the theme of the kingdom of God; where it is mentioned some 87 times, and implied everywhere. The idea of the kingdom is so central and vital that it gives the Gospels their very warp and weft; it is the hub around which Jesus' ministry revolves; it is in fact the cipher to interpreting and understanding the gospels.

A helpful paraphrase of Jesus' dramatic declaration at the beginning of his ministry is, 'the long awaited time has now come and the kingdom of God which is to embrace the whole world has begun its course' (cf. Mk 1:14-15). The kingdom is both 'present' and 'future', the tensions being held together, not in abstract theory but in the person of Jesus, the Son of Man. The fact is that everything that Jesus



says and does in the Gospels is proclamation, demonstration and revelation of the kingdom.

## **Gospel as preaching**

The Greek word '*euangelion*' (translated 'gospel'), was used in the LXX in several places for preaching or proclaiming salvation as peace (cf. Isa 52:7; 61:1). The Greek world used it as an announcement of peace as a result of victory in battle. The Roman world used it in connection with the worship of the Emperor to describe his acts and oracles that brought peace. Early Christians appear to have deliberately contrasted 'the gospel of Jesus' with 'the gospel of the Emperor'.

We have already seen that the public preaching of the apostles provided the earliest forms of the Gospels. The style and form of that preaching has left its indelible mark on the shape of the written Gospels. If we examine the earliest examples of the apostles preaching in the New Testament, called the '*kerygma*' (cf. Acts 2:14-37; 10:36-43; 1Cor 15:3-11), we see it has a clear pattern and structure: -

- Scripture has been fulfilled;
- Messiah has come;
- He is Jesus of Nazareth;
- He went about doing good;
- He was crucified in God's plan;
- He was raised and now exalted;
- He will return in glory and judgment;
- Hear, repent, and be baptized.

If you compare the structure of these early proclamations with the shape and emphasis of any of the Gospels you see that they match exactly.

The Gospels then are apostolic sermons writ large. In fact Papius (c.110 CE) tells us that Mark based his Gospel on the preaching of Peter. So the Gospels might best be described as 'preachings'. They present 'the gospel' (cf. Mk 1:1), an objective declaration about God's saving purposes, a message with life giving content (cf. Mk 1:14-15; 14:9). This message is always linked with the person of Jesus; commitment to one implies commitment to the other (cf. Mk 1:1; 8:35; 10:29). This then is the heart of what a Gospel is, a writing constructed for the express purpose that those who read it might come to a place of faith and believe. Because the Gospels are preaching we must recognise that:

- They speak into a definite situation; to people in particular circumstances to meet their needs;
- They speak God's living word; the ministry of Jesus continues to challenge with authority;
- They speak in history and theology; event and interpretation fused together.



## Gospel as history

The fact that the Gospels are 'preaching' has led to a great deal of skepticism about their historical value. Their main purpose is to proclaim a spiritual message. They do not contain nearly enough information to write a life of Jesus. The conflicting accounts of the same sayings of Jesus raise questions about his actual words. In what sense if any can we regard the Gospels as history?

In fact there is a great deal that supports the historical character of the Gospels:

- The Gospels are accounts of the message of Jesus in narrative form. They could so easily have been just a collection of sayings. The history that creates the framework, though minimal, is crucial.
- The disciples of Jesus were clearly trained by him to teach, and sent out by him on mission to do so (cf. Mt 10:5-24; Mk 6:7-13,30; Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-20). They taught as Jesus had shown them to do, so the subsequent Gospel traditions have an historically trustworthy link back to him in both content and style.
- The preaching (*kerygma*) in the New Testament (cf. Acts 10:34-43), which we have already seen form 'Gospels in microcosm', are summaries of the life of Jesus. The fact that all the key events are mentioned show that historical data about Jesus was vital in early evangelism and key to the Gospels.
- Mark shows us from the development of his opening statement that 'the gospel about Jesus Christ' was primarily a proclamation of the fact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This shows the importance the historical facts held for the early church before they went on to draw out their significance.
- Luke makes it crystal clear that his purpose is to embark on a historical task (cf. Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2); 'all that Jesus began to do and to teach'. He says that his research was thorough, complete and accurate. He got information from direct eyewitnesses. But this is not just a chronicle, they are 'events which have been fulfilled'; this is real history proving prophecy true and declaring the consequences.
- John has been most widely questioned historically, but we now see he uses reliable traditions independent of the 'synoptics' with unique historical, social and geographical information. Surely someone who gets so many verifiable details correct will also be accurate in the broad presentation. He affirms his eyewitness status; 'we have seen his glory' (1:14), 'the one who saw this happen has spoken of it' (19:35), 'that which we have heard, .. beheld with our eyes, .. looked upon, .. touched with our own hands .. we have seen, .. testify .. proclaim' (1Jn 1:1-2).

So the question is not one about historicity, it is much more to do with chronology and lack of detail, and that of course was not the writer's purpose.



## Gospel as teaching

The purpose of the Gospel writer was to communicate a vision of Jesus that met the particular teaching needs they saw within the Christian community. They wrote to particular people, within a particular environment, with particular needs. The Gospels then are theology; every bit as much as the epistles. Here is theology in a highly creative form. Its apparent simplicity has great depth and richness. They each retell the Jesus narrative in such a way that its message illuminates new situations and specific contexts, which in turn show us more of the vast implications of God's revelation in the life and person of Jesus.

We have seen that the Gospel writers work within a firm historical framework; but the writers are teachers and theologians and the way in which they relate an event is always calculated to draw out its significance. They bring the work of the historian and theologian together in a way that is different from modern understandings of these terms. They are interpreters in a way that was understood in their times, though foreign to the thinking of our own:

- In ancient Greece history was told as instructive history; it was faithful to actual events while at the same time imparting political, military and economic wisdom;
- In ancient Israel history was told as prophetic history: an account of God's saving acts, which revealed his character and his truth through actual events.

The way the Gospels interpret the Jesus narrative draws out the deeper significance of the events or parallels them with the Hebrew scriptures by using phrases that recall other passages of scripture to mind. This does not discount the historical record, but employs events to make a theological point.

An example is the parable of the wedding feast (Mt 22:1-14; Lk 14:15-24):

- Matthew's version is longer mentioning the guest without the wedding garment (vv. 11-14). Those invited are let in provided 'their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees' (cf. 5:20). The mention of the armies who destroy those who refuse the initial invitation (v. 7) would be seen in prophetic fulfillment in the events of 70 CE.
- Luke tells us more about those who would replace those first invited; the poor, the maimed and the blind (v. 21). The gospel of the kingdom comes to the Jews but is received by the outcasts and eventually the Gentiles. The invitation to the eschatological feast is being given, but it must be responded to, there can be no procrastinating.

Both versions intersect at the point of the nature of the invitation and the importance of response, but they draw out different emphases and make different points.



## MATTHEW

The fact that Jesus is the promised Messiah (1:1) dominates and influences the whole narrative. In fact we can see the Gospel fall into three main sections:

- Person of Messiah (1:1 - 4:16);
- Proclamation of Messiah (4:17 - 16:20);
- Passion of Messiah (16:21 - 28:20).

Another structural device is the way Matthew has grouped all Jesus' teaching into five blocks (5:1-7:28; 10:1- 11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1-19:1; 23:1-26:1), here is the new Moses with the new Torah.

### **Matthew's Structure**

- Prologue (1:1 – 4:16)
- Introduction to public ministry (4:17-25) “From that time on Jesus began to proclaim”
- Discourse 1: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1 – 7:29) “*Now when Jesus had finished saying these things*”
- A series of miracles and summary statement (8:1 – 9:38)
- Discourse 2: Mission (10:1 – 11:1) “*Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples*”
- Varying responses to Jesus' ministry (11:2 – 12:50)
- Discourse 3: Parables (13:1-53) “*When Jesus had finished these parables*”
- Varying responses to Jesus' ministry (13:54 – 16:20)
- Beginning of more private ministry with disciples (16:21 – 17:27) “*From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples*”
- Discourse 4: Community instructions (18:1-35) “*When Jesus had finished saying these things*”
- On the way to Jerusalem (19:1 – 20:34)
- Controversies and questions in Jerusalem (21:1 – 22:46)
- Discourse 5: Woes and eschatology (23:1 – 25:46) “*When Jesus had finished saying all these things*”
- The death and resurrection of Jesus (26:1 – 28:20)

### **Matthew's Narrative Framework**

- Opens with *biblos geneseōs* – a phrase which occurs twice in the LXX of Genesis (2:4; 5:1)
- Jesus is introduced as:
  - Messiah (as in Mark)
  - Son of David (only Bartimaeus in Mark but Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15)
    - Hebrew letters for David add up to 14 and genealogy is constructed to give 3 x 14 generations



- Son of Abraham – looks back to Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4) and anticipates Matt 28:19
- Narrative “bookends”
  - “God is with us” – 1:23; 28:20
  - Mountain
    - of temptation – 4:8 (worship Satan)
    - of commission – 28:16-20 (disciples worship Jesus)
  - Gentiles call Jesus “King of the Jews”
    - Magi from the East – 2:1-2
    - Roman governor from the West – 27:11, 37

### ***Matthew’s Plot***

- Jesus summons Israel to fulfil her destiny and embrace his message of “the kingdom of heaven” – 10:5-7
- But Jewish leaders become increasingly resistant to his teaching culminating in the woes pronounced against them in 23 and their conspiracy to have Jesus arrested and killed – 26:3-4
- Nevertheless, Jesus’ disciples (unlike Mark) grow increasingly in understanding and faith
- As a result of Jesus’ rejection, Gentiles will be invited to embrace his message and the disciples will be the instrument – 21:42-46; 28:19-20

### ***Matthean Themes***

- Gentiles as co-heirs of Abrahamic promise
  - Genealogy emphasises Jesus’ Jewishness but also includes four women:
    - Tamar, a Canaanite
    - Rahab, from Jericho
    - Ruth, a Moabite
    - The wife of Uriah, a Hittite
  - Gentiles worship Jesus (2:1-12)
  - Gentile faith (8:5-13; 27:54)
  - Galilee of the Gentiles (4:15; 28:16-20)
- Jesus as a New Moses
  - Child saved from evil king intent on slaughtering infants (2:16-18; cf. Ex 1:15 – 2:10)
  - Flight from king and growing up in another land (2:13-15; cf. Ex 2:15-22)
  - Return after death of the king (2:19-20; cf. Ex 2:23)
  - Sermon delivered from a mountain (cf. Moses and Sinai)
  - Five discourses
  - Jesus as the fulfilment of Torah (5:17-18)
- Mountains
  - Temptation (4:8-10)



- Sermon on the Mount (5:1)
- Prayer (14:23)
- Healing and feeding of 4,000 (15:29-38)
- Transfiguration (17:1-8)
- Mount of Olives (21:1; 24:3; 26:30)
- Galilee (28:16-20)
- Jesus as fulfilment of scripture
  - “this was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet”
    - Virgin birth (1:22-23)
    - Flight to Egypt (2:15)
    - Massacre of infants (2:17-18)
    - Nazareth (2:23)
    - Living in Galilee (4:14-16)
    - Healing and ministry (8:17; 12:17-21)
    - Parables (13:35)
    - Entry into Jerusalem (21:4-5)
    - Judas’ blood money (27:9-10)
  - Other fulfilment passages (2:5-6; 13:14-15; 26:54, 56)
  - Around 60 references or quotations from OT (3 x Mark)
- Righteousness
  - Never in Mark, once in Luke, but seven times in Matthew – 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32 (five in Sermon on the Mount)
  - Related adjective “righteous” or “just” occurs 17 times (twice in Mark; 11 in Luke)
  - Beatitudes highlight Matthew’s concern for ethical conduct
- Jesus’ identity
  - Opponents and questioners call him “teacher” (8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36)
  - Judas calls him “Rabbi” (26:25, 49; cf. 23:7-8)
  - Disciples and those asking for help call him “Lord” (8:2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9:28; 14:28, 30; 15:22, 25, 27; 16:22; 17:4, 15; 18:21; 20:30, 31, 33; 26:22)
- Kingdom of heaven
  - Kingdom occurs 50 times
  - Parables of the kingdom in chapter 13 form the central section of the gospel
- Church
  - Three times, not in any other gospel (16:18; 18:17)
  - Expectation of continuing community

### ***Death & Resurrection in Matthew***

- Cry of abandonment answered (unlike Mark) by apocalyptic events:
  - Splitting of rocks by earthquake (cf. Judges 5:4; 2 Sam 22:8; 1 Kings 19:11; Ps 68:8; 77:15-20)
  - Dead rising from tombs (cf. Ezek 37:12-13)



- Similarly an earthquake accompanies the resurrection (28:1)
- Risen Jesus meets women and disciples
- Disciples commissioned by risen Jesus
- “I am with you always, to the end of the age”

## MARK

Jesus moves relentlessly towards the cross; this is God’s foreordained and foretold plan. In his death he is revealed as the Son of God, the one who institutes the new covenant community.

Who is Jesus? This is a reoccurring question: explicitly (1:22, 27; 4:41; 6:2-3) implicitly (2:7,16,24; 7:5). What kind of authority? Who can do such things? Where does this authority come from? The climax comes with, ‘Who do you say I am?’ (8:29). This is:

- **A christological question** - the identity of Jesus which is seeking reader insight:
  - \* Son of God (1:1). This title has most significance in the Gospel, but it is only at cross that a person who is a pagan declares this (15:39);
  - \* Messiah/Christ. Peter’s reply, ‘You are the Christ’ (8:29) has to be interpreted in the light of suffering and death;
  - \* Son of Man. This title is the most pervasive in the Gospel (cf. 10:45; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), only fully understood in the resurrection.
- **A discipleship question** - the invitation of Jesus which is seeking reader response:
  - \* How do we follow? Passages like 8:27-38; 10:35-45 reveal the character of Messiah, this defines the nature of the disciple.

So Christology and discipleship link; the disciples are to exercise the same faithfulness, in suffering and death, as Jesus did, while awaiting the triumphant return of Son of Man.

### **Mark’s Structure**

- Prologue (1:1-15)
- Galilee and beyond (1:16 – 8:26)
- Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-30)
- On the way to Jerusalem (8:31 – 10:52)
- Jerusalem (11:1 – 16:8)



## **Mark's Pace**

- In the first half of Mark the pace is unrelenting. Mark achieves this in two ways:
  - By the use of *euthus* (immediately) which occurs 41 times in Mark (11 in chapter 1; 20 in chapters 2-8; 10 in chapters 9-16) and only 10 times in the rest of the NT
  - By the use of the “historic present” – using the present tense to narrate events in past time (e.g. 1:12). Mark does this 151 times.
- In 8:27 – 10:52 pace slows down as Jesus’ identity and destiny become clearer on the way to Jerusalem
- The last six chapters have precise time indicators and cover one week in Jerusalem:
  - Sunday (11:1-11)
  - Monday (11:12-19)
  - Tuesday (11:20 – 13:37)
  - Wednesday (14:1-11)
  - Thursday (14:12-72)
  - Friday (15:1-47)
    - morning (15:1); 9:00 (15:25); 12:00 (15:33); 15:00 (15:34); evening (15:42)
  - Saturday
  - Sunday (16:1-8)

## **Mark's Narrative Framework**

- 1:1 introduces the Markan point of view – Jesus is the Messiah (and Son of God?)
- 1:10-11 heavens are “torn apart” (cf. Matt and Luke “opened”) followed by a voice from heaven declaring Jesus to be God’s Son
- 15:38-39 curtain of the Temple “torn apart” (same Greek word) followed by the centurion declaring that Jesus is God’s Son
- Messianic secret:
  - Command of silence:
  - Demons (1:24-25, 34; 3:11-12)
  - Those healed (1:43-45; 5:43; 7:36)
  - Disciples (8:29-30; 9:7-9)
  - Misunderstanding of the disciples (e.g. 4:13; 8:17-18)
  - Mystery of the kingdom of God given to insiders only (4:10-12)
- Markan themes introduced in chapter 1 and developed as the story unfolds:
  - Jesus as Messiah (8:29; 12:35; 14:61; 15:32)
  - Jesus as Son of God (3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61; 15:39)
  - Conflict with Satan and demons (3:22-30; 5:1-20)
  - Jesus as preacher, teacher and healer
  - Discipleship



- Messianic secret

### **Mark's Literary Features**

- Markan “sandwich” – one story provides “filling” between two pieces of “bread”
  - 3:20-35 (family -> Jesus empowered by Satan -> family)
  - 5:21-43 (Jairus' daughter -> woman with haemorrhage -> Jairus' daughter)
  - 6:6-30 (mission of twelve -> death of John the Baptist -> report of the twelve)
  - 11:12-25 (fig tree -> cleansing of temple -> fig tree)
  - 14:1-11 (plot against Jesus -> anointing of Jesus at Bethany -> plot against Jesus)
  - 14:54-72 (Peter in courtyard -> Jesus before the Jewish Council -> Peter in courtyard)
- Groups of three increasing in intensity:
  - Three boat scenes (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21)
  - Three Passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34)
  - Three commands to “keep alert/awake” (13:33, 35, 37)
  - Disciples sleep three times in Gethsemane (14:37, 40, 41)
  - Peter denies Jesus three times (14:66-72)
  - Pilate asks the crowd three questions (15:9, 12, 14)
  - Three time references at three-hourly intervals when Jesus is crucified (15:25, 33, 34)

### **Jesus as Teacher and Healer**

- Although Mark presents Jesus as a teacher (1:14, 21-22, 39; 4:1-2; 6:6, 34), there is very little actual teaching compared with Matthew and Luke
  - 4 main parables (4:3-20; 4:26-29; 4:30-32; 12:1-12)
  - Eschatological discourse (13:1-37)
- 17 miracles
  - Exorcisms
  - Healings
  - Nature miracles

### **Conflict**

- Family (3:21, 31-35)
- Home town (6:1-6)
- Increasing conflict with authorities (2:6-8; 2:16; 2:24; 3:1-6; 7:1-15; 8:11-15; 10:1-12; 11:18; 11:27-33; 12:12-40; 14:1-2)
- Satan (1:13; 3:23-27)



## ***Discipleship***

- Disciples called (1:16-20; 2:13-14), chosen (3:13-19) and sent out (6:7-13)
- Fail to understand (4:13; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17-18; 8:32-33)
- Fail to exorcise a demon (9:18, 28)
- Judas betrays Jesus (14:10-11)
- Peter denies Jesus (14:66-72)
- The disciples desert Jesus and flee (14:50)
- Jesus is hard to understand and tough to follow!
- Two pivotal texts:
  - 8:22-26
    - No “immediately”
    - Blind man only sees partially at first (just like disciples)
    - Requires second touch before he can see clearly
  - 10:46-52
    - Jesus addressed in Messianic terms and does not demand silence (instead the crowd does)
    - “immediately”
    - Follows Jesus “on the way”
    - Ends the middle section; now Jesus’ identity is no longer secret, the blind see immediately and follow Jesus on the way
- Discipleship as a journey “on the way”
  - John the Baptist prepares the way (1:2-3)
  - The crowd is fed lest people faint on the way (8:3)
  - The disciples are questioned about Jesus’ identity on the way (8:27)
  - They dispute about greatness on the way (9:33)
  - The way leads to Jerusalem and the cross (10:32-34)
- Discipleship as following Jesus
  - 1:16-20; 2:13-14
  - in suffering (8:34-38; 10:28-31; 13:9-13)

## ***The Cross***

- Unrelieved darkness (15:33)
- Baptism recapitulated with reappearance of “torn apart” but no voice from heaven this time
- Cry of desolation (15:34)

## ***The Markan Ending***

- 16:8 is the best attested ending in the manuscripts



- Final irony – women are told to tell and don't whereas in 1:44-45 leper is told not to tell and does!
- Empty tomb
- Resurrection already spoken of (8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:34; 14:28)
- Ambiguity of following Jesus – terror, amazement and fear

## **LUKE**

The overarching theme of the Gospel is, 'salvation in Jesus Christ'. The full breadth of what this salvation means is seen in the Gospel's many sociopolitical themes with its emphasis on the poor and the outcast, and its themes of prayer, joy, the Holy Spirit and freedom for women.

The scene is set in the Nazareth proclamation (4:18-19) quoting from Isa 61:1-2; 58:6, proclaiming 'acceptable year of the Lord' (Jubilee Lev 25). Jesus says this anticipated time has now come and is present in his proclamation and acts; which he demonstrates to John's disciples in 7:21-22. The scandal of these words was Jesus' universal interpretation of them; freedom for the Gentiles as well, and the fact that Israel risked judgment in the face of it.

### ***Luke as Narrative***

- Luke is seeking to write an "orderly account" 1:1, 3. Greek = *diēgēsis* – a long narrative composed of a number of events
- "order" = narrative order rather than chronological order
- part of wider work: Luke-Acts

### ***Luke's Narrative Strategy***

- God's purpose to bring salvation to all people:
  - Anticipated by God's messengers in Luke 1-2;
  - Made possible through the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus;
  - Realised in the mission of the early church in Acts
- Incidents in Luke anticipate aspects of the story in Acts

### ***Luke's Structure***

- Preface (1:1-4)
- Infancy Narrative (1:5 – 2:52)
- John the Baptist and Jesus (3:1 – 4:44)
- Galilee (5:1 – 9:50)
- The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51 – 19:44)
- Jesus in the Temple (19:45 – 21:38)
- Death and Resurrection (22:1 – 24:53)



## **The Preface 1:1-4**

- Genre
  - Ancient historiography (Joel Green)
  - Ancient biography (Richard Burridge)
  - Technical “scientific” writing (Loveday Alexander)
- Style
  - One sentence in Greek
  - Best stylised Greek in the whole NT
- Narrative/orderly account = *diegesis*
  - Longer narrative composed of a number of events and arranged using major developments and patterns
  - Well-ordered, polished product of the historian
  - Narrative as proclamation designed to persuade (Luke’s use of verb *diegeomai* in Luke 8:39; 9:10; Acts 8:33; 9:27; 12:17)
- Luke writes as a Christian (us)
- Emphasis on reliability/trustworthiness
- Orderly = attention to narrative arrangement/sequence
- Theological intention – to know the truth (stands emphatically as last word of sentence in Greek)

## **Infancy Narratives**

- Stories of John and Jesus presented in parallel
- Literary structure
  - Repetition
  - Increasing disclosure of God’s purposes
  - Joy and pathos
- Patterned on OT annunciations (Ishmael, Isaac, Samson)
  - Appearance of an angel
  - Fear/prostration of visionary
  - Divine message
  - Objection by visionary
  - Giving of a sign to reassure visionary
- Begins and ends in temple
- Intertextuality:
  - Annunciation stories
  - Hymns
  - 1:25 cf. Gen 30:23; 1:42 cf. Judges 5:24
  - 2:25 cf. Isa 40:1; 49:13; 2:38 cf. Isa 52:9
- Central Lukan themes announced

## **John the Baptist (3:1-20)**

- John presented as prophet (cf. Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah)



- Jordan, desert and crowds:
  - Joshua and promised land
  - Prophets and revolution (Josephus, *War* 2.258-60)
- References to preparing the Lord's way and salvation for all people in the Benedictus (1:76-77) echo Isa 40:3-5 and anticipate 3:4-6
- 3:5-6 does not appear in Matt or Mark
  - Filling of valleys and lowering of mountains echo 1:52-53
  - Salvation as major Lukan theme

### ***Lukan Introductions to Mission***

- Sermon at beginning of ministry:
  - John (3:7-9)
  - Jesus (4:16-27)
  - Peter (Acts 2:14-36)
  - Paul (Acts 13:16-41)
- Scriptural quotation as key to mission:
  - John (Isa 40:3-5 in 3:4-6)
  - Jesus (Isa 61:1-2 in 4:18-19)
  - Peter (Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21)
  - Paul (Isa 49:6 in Acts 13:47)

### ***Baptism of Jesus (3:21-22)***

- Jesus as son (1:35; 2:49) cf. 3:23; 4:22, 41
  - Development in narrative (2:40 -> Jesus in temple at 12 -> 2:52 -> 3:22)
- Descent of Spirit initiates series of events (4:1, 14, 18)
  - Paralleled in Acts: Pentecost -> mission
- Prayer (3:21 – only in Luke)
  - Setting for divine revelation – Zechariah (1:9-11); Anna (2:37-38); Cornelius (Acts 10:2-6); Peter (Acts 10:9-16); Paul (Acts 9:11-12; 22:17-21); prophets and teachers at Antioch (Acts 13:2)

### ***Temptation of Jesus (4:1-13)***

- Initiative of the Spirit
- Israel's testing in the wilderness (Deut 8:2-3; 6:14-16)
- Narrative link between descent of Spirit and Jesus' realisation of reason for anointing in 4:18-19
  - What does it mean to be "son of God"?
    - Solidarity with starving in their reliance on God (cf. 1:53)
    - Refusal to grasp for power and glory (cf. 1:52 but note 1:32-33 and Ps 2:7-8)
    - Glory or suffering in Jerusalem? (cf. 1:50, 54; 22:39-53; 23:35-37)



- Anticipates divine-diabolic contest throughout Luke-Acts

### ***Nazareth Manifesto (4:16-30)***

- Programmatic statement
- Role of the Spirit
- Good news for the poor
- Eschatological reversal
- Jubilee (Leviticus 25)
  - Fallow year
  - Remission of debts
  - Liberation of slaves
  - Redistribution of capital
- Division and opposition

### ***Lukan Themes***

- Good news for the marginalised
  - Poor (4:18; 6:20-21; 14:12-14; 16:19-31; 19:1-10)
  - Sinners (5:29-32; 15:1-2; 19:7)
  - Women (Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, women disciples in 8:2-3, Mary and Martha in 10:38-42, etc.)
  - Non-Jews (2:32; 4:24-27; 10:29-37; 17:11-19; 24:47)
- Prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1-3; 22:31-32, 41-42)
- Holy Spirit (1:15, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25-27; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; 24:49)
- Joy and praise
- Salvation
- Divine plan

### ***Discipleship***

- The Way
  - Description of early Christian community in Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)
  - John “prepares the way”
  - Disciples are “on the way” to Jerusalem, to Emmaus (Luke 10:38; 13:22; 14:25; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11; 24:32)
- Luke 12
  - Interplay between crowds and disciples (1, 13, 22, 41, 54)
  - Pharisees and crowd are hypocrites (1, 13, 22, 41, 54). Will disciples become like crowd or crowd like disciples?
  - Persecution and possessions: fear of death and worry about subsistence are key issues
  - To the crowd: “guard against greed” (13-21)
  - To the disciples: “do not be anxious” (22-34)



- Discipleship = giving up possessions (12:32-34; 14:33; 16:13; 18:18-30; 19:8-9)
- 14:25-33
  - Abandoning security and identity
  - Carrying the cross
  - Counting the cost
  - Giving up possessions

### ***Death & Resurrection***

- One bandit responds (23:39-43)
- Jesus' cry of commitment at end (23:46)
- Centurion proclaims Jesus' innocence (23:47)
- Crowds respond (23:48)
- Women and others watch at a distance (23:49)
- Women see two men in dazzling clothes and tell disciples (24:1-11)
- Peter (24:12)
- Emmaus
- Jesus appears to disciples (24:36-49)
- Ascension – disciples return to temple (24:50-52)

### **JOHN**

The purpose of the Gospel is clearly stated, 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs ... but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in his name' (20:30-31).

- **Believing:** the Gospel is written to inspire faith in both believer and unbeliever. This comes by the seeing of spiritual perception. The conclusion, of the events surrounding the healing of the man born blind, was 'that those who do not see might see' (9:39). Thomas is told, 'blessed are those who have not seen but believe' (20:28).
- **Confessing:** the purpose was christological. Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and John was not simply recounting Jesus' life, he was declaring and confessing truth. Confessing had important repercussions to Jesus' hearers (c.f 9:22, 12:42, 16:2), and also to the Church. John's declaration that Jesus was the Son of God is the Gospel's most pervasive reference to Jesus; it shows us his preexistence (1:1-14), his entering the world as saviour (3:16), and his exultation in his death (12:28-32).
- **Living:** those who believed and confessed would have life in his name. This is eternal life, the life of the age to come, nothing short of salvation. This was something inseparably linked with the Holy Spirit (cf. esp. Jn 7, 14, 16).



## **John's Structure**

- Prologue (1:1-18)
- Jesus' public ministry (1:19 – 12:50)
  - Seven signs
  - Seven discourses
  - Summary (12:44-50)
- Jesus' departure from the world (13:1 – 20:31)
  - Interpreted for the disciples (13:1 – 17:26)
  - Passion and resurrection (18:1 – 20:31)
- Epilogue (21:1-25)

## **Jesus' Public Ministry**

2:1-11 First Sign	6:1-15 Fourth Sign
-----	6:16-21 Fifth Sign
3:1-21 First Discourse	6:22-71 Fourth Discourse
-----	7:1-39 Fifth Discourse
4:1-42 Second Discourse	-----
-----	8:12-59 Sixth Discourse
4:46-54 Second Sign	9:1-41 Sixth Sign
5:1-18 Third Sign	10:1-42 Seventh Discourse
5:19-47 Third Discourse	11:1-53 Seventh Sign

## **John as Lawsuit**

- Prologue
  - Interrupted by references to John the Baptist in 1:6-8, 15. In these verses John's role is as a witness
- Public ministry
  - 1:19-28 John's testimony about himself
  - 1:29-34 John's testimony about Jesus
  - 5:19-47 trial motif explicit in controversy with Jews (22, 24, 27, 30-39, 45)
  - 8:12-59 trial motif explicit (13-18, 26, 50)
  - 12:44-50 Jesus as judge concludes this section
- John 13-17
  - Holy Spirit as Paraclete or Advocate (14:16, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11)
- John 18-20
  - Dominated by trial of Jesus
- Epilogue
  - Testimony of the beloved disciple (21:24)



- Testimony thus frames the public ministry and the narrative as a whole encouraging us to view the whole gospel from the perspective of a trial
- Prologue provides cosmic backdrop. Lawsuit is between Jesus and Israel (1:11) but also between God and the world (1:1, 10) with the notion of truth at stake (1:9, 14)

### ***Trial***

- John has no trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Instead, Jesus is on trial before Israel's leaders throughout his public ministry. In this trial 7 witnesses are called:
  - John the Baptist
  - Jesus himself (8:14, 17-18)
  - Jesus' works (5:36; 10:25)
  - God (5:32, 37; 8:18)
  - Scriptures (5:39)
  - Samaritan woman (4:39)
  - Crowd who witness the raising of Lazarus (12:17)

### ***Charges & Plot***

- Charges
  - Deceiving the people (7:45-52)
  - Violator of the Sabbath (5:16; 7:23; 9:16)
  - Blasphemy (5:17-18; 8:58-59; 10:30-39)
  - Enemy of the Jewish nation (11:46-53)
- Plot
  - Jesus is commissioned to witness to the truth about God (18:37)
  - The plot is complicated by the world not receiving his testimony (1:10-11). Instead, there is a counterplot against Jesus taking the form of a counter-trial – Jewish trial of his public ministry and Roman trial leading to crucifixion.
  - Resolution occurs by counter-trials achieving the purpose of the overall lawsuit. The world's verdict on Jesus results in his crucifixion which, ironically, allows him to complete his commission – “it is finished” (19:30).

### ***Key Stages in the Trial***

- The testimony of John the Baptist (1:6-8, 15, 19-34; 3:25-30)
- The testimony from above (3:11-21, 31-36)
- Jesus as the just judge and the testimonies to Jesus (5:19-47)
- The truth of Jesus' own testimony and judgment (8:12-59)
- The interrogation of the man born blind (9:1-41)



- Jesus and the judgment of the world (12:37-50)
- The preparation of the disciples for testifying and the role of the Paraclete (14:16-17, 26; 15:26 – 16:15)
- The trial before Pilate (18:28 – 19:16a)
- Resurrection as vindication (20:1-29)

### ***Truth at Stake***

- Truth is the final judgment in the lawsuit (“What is truth?” 18:38)
- As such truth is contested
- Truth depends on witnesses
- Truth at stake involves:
  - Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (20:31) – christological
  - God as the one who is known in the crucified Jesus (19:30) – theological
  - Divine verdict of life through death of Jesus (3:16; 6:47-51) – soteriological
  - Relationship of love (3:16; 14:21, 23; 17:23, 26) - relational

### **SUMMARY**

These are some of the key theological strands and themes within the Gospels, but there are many others that form their warp and weft.

The gospels are story. Our analytical minds so dissect history and theology that we fail to see that God most frequently reveals himself in stories. Biblical truth is embodied in concrete situations not abstract propositions; it is found in stories that can be told. It has been well said, ‘the Bible is not so much a book of systematic theology as a history of situational theism’. There is no more fundamental way to talk about God than in a story. Doctrines are not the result of stories, they are not the heart or meaning of the stories, they are the tools (sometimes misleading ones) to help us tell the stories better.

Truth and event come together in story; they are remembered, understood and applied all at the same time. The theoretical, intellectual, practical and emotional are all equally present. There is simplicity and complexity together. This is the genius of biblical revelation and why it can touch the young and the mature the educated and the untaught equally. So the Gospels as story show biblical revelation at its finest.

The opinion that the Gospel narratives are somehow less theological than the epistles of Paul is nonsense. We are to let the story unfold and confront us with its own theological message:

- They are to be read as wholes not fragments; we are to feel the movement and flow of the story;



- Remember that all stories are selective and incomplete, no storyteller tells everything;
- Notice the author's selection and arrangement of material to accomplish their purpose;
- Stories are not written to answer our questions but to express the writers burden;
- Stories are not allegories with secret meanings;
- Events in stories are often presented both as the result of natural causes and the activity of God (e.g. Jesus' death - wicked men + will of God; this interpretative element integral to the Gospels);
- Stories teach indirectly, to tell truth they tell a story that relates to people's lives.

## GOSPEL AND STUDY

In reading, studying and interpreting the text of the Gospels there are eight principles which need to be applied at all times. They are keys:

- **Think environment:** Understand the history, politics, society, customs, social groups, attitudes, practices and expectations of the people of first century Palestine. This will help you recover the original significance and impact of the words and events of the Gospels.
- **Think situation:** Identify, if you can, the original life situation, also the particular circumstances in which each saying and event took place. Ask the simple questions; Who? What? When? Where? Why? The disciples alone? Small group? Large multitude? In reply to accusations? Etc.
- **Think complete:** Study the Gospels as 'wholes' not as 'fragments', each writer has constructed a distinct unit to stand on its own developing clear themes as an interpretation of Jesus' life. Failure to approach each Gospel as a complete entity destroys its essential nature.
- **Think structure:** Note the length of the narratives and their position within the whole text. Look out for interpretive statements often at the climax of the story. Spot reoccurring stereotyped formulas like Mt 7:28; 11:1 etc which are keys to overall structure.
- **Think horizontal:** Examine parallel passages in other Gospels. This will highlight the distinctiveness of each Gospel, and will identify the different contexts in which similar material is used. The Gospels were not written for reading in parallel, but neither were they written in isolation.
- **Think vertical:** Try to hold the two historical contexts of Jesus' own situation and that of the writer's situation in tension. Try to understand how these different situations give the focus to the 'theological' dimension of the Gospels.



- **Think readers:** Imagine how the words of the Gospels would have impacted the first readers, outside of Palestine but in the early decades of the Christian era. Contemplate the challenge to their worldview and circumstances.
- **Think contemporary:** Allow the Gospel accounts to speak for themselves in such a way that they smash the false pictures of Jesus created by history and western imagination. Hear him speak through his own time in such a way that the Holy Spirit makes his words alive to our own time, revealing the Galilean truly to be the person of every age and culture, truly the saviour of the world.

## QUESTIONS

1. How would you make a film about 'the life of Jesus'? What would you try to communicate? What criteria would you use? What major difficulties do you think would you face?

2. Devise a creative church programme using all possible means and media to motivate and guide people into and through a study of the life and teaching of Jesus.

## READING & RESOURCES

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