

Four Distinct Views

You have probably gone to the theatre to see a movie with friends. Perhaps you sat in a row, passing a bucket of popcorn back and forth. Pairs of eyes intently absorbed highly crafted images; ears caught every word. When it was over, the conversation bounced back and forth. "I just loved seeing...?" You realize you missed something and saw the movie altogether differently.

As time goes by, maybe around an after-movie pizza, it's discovered that while the film's storyline was the same, the experience differed from person to person.

Talking Points

- Mathew was a redeemed tax collector. Because of his partnership with Israel's Roman oppressors, Mathew was hated by his people, the Jews. Matthew was one of Jesus' inner circle of twelve disciples. The Gospel of Matthew was written to Jewish people everywhere. Matthew's objective was to present Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Jewish prophecy.
- Mark was a second-generation Jewish believer in Jesus. The source of Mark's gospel record is probably Peter. Mark's Gospel was written to the Roman world, built on the backs of slaves and servants. Jesus is portrayed as the perfect slave of God. See Mark 10:45.
- Luke was a traveling companion of Paul. The other Gospels were built around important themes. Matthew, Mark, and John were not particularly concerned with the sequence of Jesus' life. Luke wrote his account of Jesus chronologically. His approach appealed to the minds of the Greeks.
- John's Gospel was the last written record of Jesus' life, likely composed in Asia Minor after he left Israel. John had watched Jesus' story travel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world. His Gospel painted Jesus as the Son of God, Saviour of the whole world.

Background

Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell the story of Jesus. They present four distinct views of the singular life of Jesus. There are similarities. Some passages appear to be precisely the same, word-for-word. However, each Gospel author presented his Jesus story uniquely.

Some events of Jesus' life appear in only one Gospel, like the account of Nicodemus learning about the second birth and the Samaritan woman at the well. Other events (demon-possessed man in Gedara) are presented in two or three versions. Only a few details of Jesus' life are included in all four Gospels, including the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.\

Gospel of Luke

Disciple Daily's approach to equipping disciples for ministry is to demonstrate an easy method of telling the story of the Bible, one individual account at a time, in chronological order. In the opening verses of Luke's Gospel, he tells Theophilus that he is laying out the life of Jesus in chronological order so that he "may know the exact truth about the things which you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4)."

The primary audience of Luke's Gospel was the Greek world. The Greeks were very interested in sequential order and how one event led to another. By using Luke's story of the life of Jesus, we can "unbundle" the events of the other gospels and place the individual stories side-by-side for a complete picture of what happened.

Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's primary audience was the Jewish people. God planned that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be the avenue through which God reclaims all Creation and blesses the entire world.

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, were written by Jewish authors. Matthew's account relies more heavily on the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) prophecies than any of the other gospels. Matthew's particular interest was that the Jewish people would see what Jesus did and said, compare it to what the prophets wrote, and conclude that Jesus was their long-expected prophet like Moses, the eternal Son of David, and their Messianic King.

Gospel of Mark

Mark was a close associate of the Apostle Peter, perhaps even a relative. His account is more concerned with what Jesus did than what He said. Like those who built Roman roads and cities, slaves were expected to do what their masters commanded immediately, without question. Jesus is portrayed as the Father's ultimate "servant/slave." See Mark 10:45. The Father sent Jesus into the world to serve humanity. The Father commanded. Jesus obeyed.

Gospel of John

John's record fills in some blank spaces not covered in the other three. We discover more about the earliest days of Jesus' ministry from John. Luke was written for the Greeks, Mathew for the Jews, and Mark addressed Roman concerns. John was written for everyone.

Most scholars place the writing of John around 90 A.D., sixty years after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. By the time John completed his report, all the other authors had passed out of this life into their reward on the other side.

John spent the latter years of His life in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), most likely in Ephesus and on the island of Patmos, where Revelation was given to him by the Lord

Jesus. The Gospel John wrote focused on seven sign miracles that Jesus performed. Jesus made seven declarations throughout His ministry of being the great "I am" of Moses' encounter on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 3:14-15).

Breath of Life

Like all other Scripture, the Gospels are "God-breathed." The Gospel accounts convey each author's unique thoughts and concerns. At the same time, every word in the original documents was inspired by God. No word or idea was inscribed that didn't directly come from the mind of God. Because of this two-fold truth, the Gospels present four distinct views while communicating one singular Good News. They communicate everything God wants His followers to know about "His only begotten Son."

Bible Conversations

- Think back to a familiar family story that happened years ago that everyone still talks about. What are the different ways family members remember the details? What are the similarities?
- Do the various viewpoints of your family story change the reality of what happened?
- If the story is old enough to be a family legend, something second and third-generation family members are now telling, who does the family go to for accurate details?
- How does the exercise above enrich your understanding of the four accounts of Jesus' life?
- In what ways are the cumulative gospel accounts of Jesus' life similar to your "family story?" How are they completely different both in content and formation?